

FE Week

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EMPLOYER CRITICISM**

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UP AT THE LORDS**

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JCP TRAINEESHIP 'TARGET' AFTER 'CONCERNS SCHEME EXTENDS BENEFIT CLAIMS'

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EXCLUSIVE

Job Centre Plus (JCP) staff have been set a "target" of 10,000 traineeship referrals amid concerns the youth unemployment programme had not been promoted to benefit claimants because it extended their time out of work, *FE Week* can reveal.

The figure, to be achieved within 12 months from August this year, was disclosed in documents released following a Freedom of Information request. It is split into "planning assumptions" for England's 28 JCP districts, but a Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) spokesperson said they did not represent targets despite, according to the documents, telling JCP staff to "ensure steps in place to achieve allocations."

There had been concerns that JCP staff were not putting benefit claimants on the programme because it affected their search for paid employment in the meantime.

Association of Employment and Learning Providers chief executive Stewart Segal said: "We have heard of many examples of where JCPs have not referred clients because they are concerned that traineeships are too long and will delay people getting off benefits. Providers are creating flexible programmes that ensure young people get the skills they need to sustain employment in the long term and JCP must support this process. It is good that JCP will set targets for referrals, but this should not become a numbers game."

The Statistical First Release published on

November 26 showed there had been 10,400 traineeship starts during 2013/14 — the programme's first year.

Dr Fiona Aldridge, assistant director for development and research at the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, said: "We have found that referrals to traineeships, by JCP staff, have been relatively low."

She added: "We are in the process of capturing the good practice that exists between JCP and traineeship providers and will use this to develop support materials to help work coaches identify suitable participants. This will be invaluable in improving levels of awareness and understanding among JCP staff. It will improve partnership working between local JCPs and providers."

Teresa Frith, senior skills policy manager for the Association of Colleges (AoC), said: "We are discussing with DWP how colleges can support JCPs in achieving these targets."

"We're pleased to see the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills [BIS] and DWP working more closely as this allows for a more holistic approach in supporting people who are unemployed."

A DWP spokesperson said: "There are no targets, but we want to help as many young people as possible to improve their skills and move into work. Traineeships are key to this, so as the programme grows we will be referring more young claimants to it."

He declined to comment on claims about JCPs not referring clients to traineeships. A BIS spokesperson declined to comment.

See editor's comment on page 10

**'Outstanding'
FE Week
reporter
Paul**



It's official — FE Week journalism is worthy of an award!

Reporter Paul Offord, aged 37, walked away from this year's CIPR Education Journalism awards with the top prize for his 'outstanding FE journalism'.

His entry, a series of reports last academic year covering Bright International as awarding organisations (AOs) walked away from the independent learning provider and culminating in a damning AO report on its practices, impressed judges who praised the quality of his "investigative journalism".

He said: "I couldn't believe it when I won, but am really pleased. I would like to thank my colleagues and the many disgruntled learners who tipped me off with different angles to keep the story running and in particular my whistleblower who had

the guts to speak out."

He added: "This is a nice Christmas present for the whole team at *FE Week* and good recognition of the emphasis the paper places on investigative journalism."

Chris Henwood, *FE Week* editor, said: "The award comes as much-deserved recognition for Paul's dogged determination to follow through to the end a very serious story covering how learners were left in the dark about whether their learning achievements would be certificated. His reporting expertly straddled the fine line between what can and can't be published legally while at all times holding the interests of learners at heart."

Paul said his £500 prize would be spent on taking wife Gabreille, 44, and their four-year-old son, William, on a Christmas trip to Westleton, in Suffolk.



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FALLING NUMBERS AND COMPETITION BLAMED AS TOTTON SEEKS MERGER

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A Hampshire sixth form college principal has blamed falling learner numbers and local competition for financial problems forcing it to look at a merger.

Totton College principal Mike Gaston (pictured) has announced the college will be seeking a partnership in the new year after Sixth Form College Commissioner Peter Mucklow warned it could not function alone.

Mr Mucklow visited the 3,370-learner college, which was deemed by Ofsted to require improvement in March and has a current Education Funding Agency (EFA) allocation of £5.4m, in October after concerns were raised about a lack of improvement since it was issued with a financial notice to improve in the spring.

He warned the college, which also runs adult provision with a £2m Skills Funding (SFA) allocation and through subcontracting, faced an “immediate” crisis with the SFA seeking to claw back funding allocated for 24+ apprenticeships never delivered.

Mr Gaston said: “You could always see that this college was swimming against the tide a little bit. The college was graded inadequate by Ofsted in 2011 and when you are working in a very competitive market, that isn’t going to be on your side.

“We have a falling year 11 cohort. We are expecting a 12 per cent drop in the next five years, and Hampshire has its own unique situation in terms of the number of providers.

“Within a 12-mile radius of Totton, there are



six post-16 providers, either sixth form colleges or general FE colleges and at the same time there is a new sixth form provision being built in Shrewsbury, where a lot of our learners come from.”

“We believe a merger with one or more suitable partners will ensure the college is best placed to realise its ambitions for learners, the community and employers, and for staff. We continue to work with the EFA and SFA to achieve this aim,” added Mr Gaston.

Mr Mucklow recommended, among other things, the EFA bring a £770,000 payment forward to the January to March period, and the SFA should claw back £280,000 in April to June instead of February.

It comes after Prior Pursglove College, which was graded inadequate by Ofsted in January having previously been rated as good, was praised for its progress in a fourth monitoring report. Inspectors said it had made significant or reasonable improvement in all areas.

No one from Prior Pursglove was available for comment.

Payment link to new outcome measures rejected

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Skills Minister Nick Boles (pictured) has announced a second consultation on outcome-based success measures having all but ruled out their use in a “payment by results system”.

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) launched a three-month consultation in August on plans to add post-19 learner outcomes to qualification achievement as measures of success from 2016/17.

It proposed that the data should include whether learners get a job, details of subsequent salaries, and whether they continue learning.

The consultation further looked at proposed definitions for the measures, what additional information would be helpful, the uses to which the data could be put and how it should be presented and published. It also put forward using the new success measures to help set minimum standards that could trigger further investigation and ultimately intervention.

However, a document published by BIS on Wednesday (December 10) outlining the results of the consultation and the government’s own response, highlighted concerns about the possible new minimum

standards framework.

It also said the government “expected that the outcome measures would not be used as part of a payment by results system; such a system must be able to track individual learners and matched data cannot be used in that way.”

Mr Boles, in the document, said: “We intend to proceed with the new measures as proposed in the consultation paper, but we want to make sure they are as useful as they can be.

“There are a number of issues we need to explore further and we will consult on the detail of, and timetable for, using and publishing the measures as part of a new accountability framework.”

A BIS spokesperson said the additional consultation would get under way within a year.

Meanwhile, the Department for Education’s response to a consultation on publishing performance measures on school and college websites came out on Thursday (December 11).

The month-long consultation, which ran from June 6, asked for views on whether



colleges should have headlines performance measures, including learner progress, attainment, English and maths progress, retention and destinations, displaying on their website to allow parents and potential students to compare institutions.

The response added: “In light of the comments received we plan to continue to explore how we can present the headline measures in a way that best meets the needs of parents.”

Joy Mercer, senior policy manager for quality assurance, said: “The response reveals that the DfE needs to do some further research into the presentation of performance tables on college websites.

“We would encourage them to continue to involve colleges and schools in their next steps as it is important that parents and young people are not misled by something that looks attractive but does not put the information in context.”

The government will conduct “further user research” to find out the best way to do this and will inform colleges next autumn of the final requirements for 2016.

Brathay time extended

The deadline for entries the Brathay Apprentice Challenge has been extended by a week, with nominations now closing on Friday, December 19, at noon.

The challenge sees teams of apprentices from across England compete in team building, leadership, logistical and communications challenges, as well as raising money for charity. Last year’s apprentices raised more than £30,000 for charity and the team from PepsiCo were crowned winners.

Teams wishing to enter should visit www.challenge.brathay.org.uk/bac15/ to register.

Early years letter

The Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) has written to Skills Minister Nick Boles calling for a review of the English and maths requirements for early years training.

Currently early years learners, including apprentices, have to complete GCSE maths and English at grade C or above before finishing the course and will, from August, need it to start the course.

AELP also called for Functional Skills qualifications to be accepted alongside GCSEs.

English and maths video

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) has produced a video in response to a BIS select committee report on how numeracy and literacy levels could be improved.

The video, made because the committee asked BIS to respond in an “accessible” way to the report, featured Skills Minister Nick Boles agreeing with “the main thrust” of the committee’s findings, published in September.

A message that appeared on-screen also stated the government accepted the report’s call for less focus on GCSEs. Visit feweek.co.uk to watch the video.

NEWS

'More complexity' fears for AELP on careers plan

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The Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) has expressed "real concerns" about the government's creation of a new company to support careers advice in schools.

Stewart Segal (pictured), AELP chief executive, said the careers company, proposed by Education Secretary Nicky Morgan (pictured) on Wednesday (December 10), risked adding to the "complexity" in the skills system.

His concerns were echoed by the Association of Colleges (AoC), which warned the company might not be a "silver bullet" on the issue of careers advice, and the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), which said the measure "did not go far enough".

Ms Morgan said the employer-led independent body would help schools fulfil their statutory duty to offer careers advice by brokering relationships between schools and employers.

She said the company "will encourage greater collaboration between employers and schools, helping schools and colleges access a wealth of experience to inspire



young people about the possibilities of the world of work".

"This will benefit young people across the country and ensure they leave school fully prepared for life in modern Britain," she said.

However, Mr Segal said AELP would prefer to see a larger-scale solution to the problem of careers advice.

"We have real concerns about the creation of this new company adding to the already widely acknowledged complexity in the skills system," he said.

"Our long-standing position is that England should have an integrated all-age service with the Department for Education and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills presiding over a single structure built around the services of the National Careers Service (NCS).

"We are pleased that there is a renewed focus on careers advice for 12 to 18-year-olds but it must be customer-focused and not cause confusion for schools."

The company will form a £5m investment fund to support its work and is expected to be funded initially through the £20m set aside by Chancellor George Osborne in this year's autumn statement, although it is not clear how much of that funding will be used.

Richard Atkins, AoC president, said careers education in England was "broken... but it's unlikely that there is any single silver bullet that will ensure every

'Good to see government action'

Deirdre Hughes, chair of the National Careers Council

It is good to see the Government taking action in recognition that more needs to be done for young people and families when it comes to accessing and receiving careers advice. Now much will depend on how this newly announced organisation will be shaped and delivered at a national and local level.

Let's not underestimate — young people's life chances are at stake if Government gets this wrong.

Confederation of British Industry director general John Cridland

The new careers company has the potential to make a big difference, and we look forward to working with Christine Hodgson and her team. Every young person should have access to good support and advice, whatever their background.

Ultimately, this new body will be a success if it uses its power to look across the country to find and tackle local areas where young people are not getting the support they need."

young person receives effective careers education".

"We therefore look forward to working with the careers company, the NCS and others to form an alliance to redress the current failing system," he said.

Dr Mary Bousted, ATL general secretary, said: "While this is a useful addition to the landscape of careers guidance, it doesn't go far enough. ATL has consistently called for face-to-face careers support for pupils in schools.

"This announcement suggests many ways for employers to become

involved with schools, but it is not clear that there is funding for independent careers advice as and when pupils need it."

The company will be chaired by Capgemini UK chair Christine Hodgson and Career Development Institute (CDI) president Karen O'Donoghue will form part of the national advisory groups for the company's board.

Ms O'Donoghue said: "If the new company has a brief to review the potential to ensure a genuinely all age, all stage careers service, delivering professional career guidance services then this must be a positive move."



National college numbers swell to seven 'to fill important gap'

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Three new national colleges will train workers for the manufacturing, wind energy and creative and cultural industries, the government has announced.

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills revealed on Thursday (December 11) that it had approved a new wave of employer-led colleges along with £80m of government capital funding, which is expected to be matched by businesses.

The National College for Advanced Manufacturing will be established in Sheffield and Coventry in partnership with the High Value Manufacturing Catapult (HVMC) and the EEF, while the National College for Wind Energy will be established in the Humber.

The National College for the Creative and Cultural Industries will be founded at the Backstage Centre in Essex and managed by Creative and Cultural Skills on behalf of a consortium of employers including Live Nation and the Royal Opera House.

The establishment of the three new colleges will bring the total to seven, including colleges for HS2, fracking and nuclear power that were announced earlier this year, and the college for digital skills announced on Monday (December 8), as covered on feweeek.co.uk.

Martin Doel, chief executive at the

Association of Colleges, said: "We welcome the creation of new FE colleges in the form of National Colleges which, we hope, will work closely with existing colleges to learn from their best practice to the benefit of students."

David Hughes, chief executive of the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, said: "Greater investment in the development of higher-level vocational skills through four new employer-led national colleges is an important step in helping place vocational training on a par with higher education. As is the announcement of maintenance support for vocational learners."

Edge Foundation chief executive Jan Hodges (pictured) said: "National colleges will fill an important gap in our education and training system. Compared with other countries, we have worryingly few people with high-level technical qualifications such as higher national diplomas, yet these open the way to excellent careers across all sectors of the economy.

"Graduates from national colleges will go on to well-paid, rewarding careers in manufacturing, IT, renewable energy and the creative industries. What's more, they'll have the talent and ability to create new ideas and inventions, which will drive future economic prosperity."



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AoC defends colleges after Wilshaw

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Association of Colleges (AoC) chief executive Martin Doel has defended his members after Ofsted chief inspector Sir Michael Wilshaw renewed his questioning of the sector over employer engagement.

The education watchdog's 2013/14 annual report, published on Wednesday (December 10), had positive words for the FE and skills sector in referring to a growing proportion of quality providers, but it also bemoaned a "lack of employer involvement".

Sir Michael, echoing concerns he raised in the 2012/13 annual report, wrote: "The FE and skills sector is generally better than it was two years ago in terms of the quality of provision. However, too many institutions are still not equipping learners with the knowledge and skills that employers seek."

And, in an exclusive interview with *FE Week* following the release of the report, Ofsted director of FE and skills Lorna Fitzjohn said colleges needed to respond to the needs of employers in their local areas, but also called on businesses to be more proactive.

She said: "I think it is important that employers are clear on what they want but actually then join with the sector and work with the sector so that what comes out of it is what the employers want at the end of it. I do think there is more that providers and colleges can do to promote apprenticeships in their regions to work with their employers to get more apprenticeships on board."

But Mr Doel said: "This must be recognised as a two-way street with employers being fully engaged in working with colleges to create meaningful qualifications relevant for the future job market." He also drew attention to colleges' engagement with "an average of 600 businesses" — a claim that has repeatedly featured in recent AoC responses.

Ms Fitzjohn, in a further echo of past Ofsted criticism, also expanded on the report's mention of local enterprise partnership (Lep) responses to skills shortages, calling them "inconsistent". She said: "I think some of the Leps are good and doing a good job, but there are some which are not. What I would want to see is more FE representation on Lep boards. I think that would really help the situation

because they would know and understand the sector. I think the Leps are very focused on level three and engineering and high-level skills.

"I think they need to think far more about those young people who come out at level one at 16. The more disadvantaged, those who need a good start in life, so I think there is much more they can do."

She also raised concerns about the quality of provision offered by employer providers after the report revealed the majority of the 16 providers inspected in 2013/14 had been graded as inadequate (three) or requires improvement (seven). The rest were good. It comes a year after *FE Week* took an in depth look at the employer provider offer.

She said: "We are concerned about them and have been for some while. I think that does focus on a particular issue for us. Some of those large employer providers will have offered a Train to Gain programme in the past which was very much about assessment, it was not about teaching new skills for apprenticeships. What we are keen for, and what apprenticeships should be about is learning new skills and people making progress and developing in their job role and giving them opportunities for the future. And we are seeing a system that isn't teaching or training new skills for apprenticeships, despite the fact the learners are achieving the apprenticeship. They are at the same level and doing the same job with the same skills as when they started the programme. We will keep a close eye on them."

A Department for Business, Innovation and Skills spokesperson said: "We are committed to driving up quality across the FE sector and have introduced a faster, more robust intervention regime that works to rapidly tackle poor performance. The government is investing more than £30m over two years to raise the capacity and quality of the FE workforce.

"This is already having an impact with more than 2,000 existing teachers having enhanced their skills in teaching maths and more than 800 doing so in English. In addition to this, more than 400 graduates are receiving bursaries to teach in FE and more than 130 new maths teachers have already been recruited with support of government grants."

Key points from the Ofsted annual report on FE and skills

- Proportion of FE and skills providers rated good or outstanding has risen to 81 per cent from 72 per cent last year
- Colleges and schools with sixth forms have "failed to respond to the requirements of study programmes quickly enough"
- English and maths teaching is "still not good enough". Inspections found many learners were working towards qualifications which were not higher than their previous levels of attainment
- Employers aren't offering enough apprenticeships. Apprenticeship starts among 16 to 18-year-olds have been "stagnant" for 10 years. Providers not doing enough to adapt training to community needs
- Local tracking of learners remains "unreliable"
- No "effective" national skills strategy or local accountability for the range of post-16 provision
- Secondary pupils "frequently receive poor careers advice"
- Inspection of providers offering traineeships showed low numbers of trainees, reflecting a "slow start" to the initiative

SIR MICHAEL WILSHAW
Ofsted chief inspector



Too many young people are leaving schools and colleges without the skills and attitudes employers are looking for. Indeed, despite there being around one million young people aged 16 to 24 not in work, education or training, 22 employers report that almost three in every 10 vacancies are hard to fill.

DR MARY BOUSTED
General secretary of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers



The FE and skills sector has a critical role in ensuring that all young people and adults are appropriately prepared for good-quality jobs. It is encouraging, therefore, that we have seen an increase in the proportion of FE providers judged to be good or outstanding at their latest inspection.

This reflects improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in providers inspected this year. However, I am concerned that there is not enough good teaching in the subject areas where it is needed most.

JAMES KEWIN
Deputy chief executive, Sixth Form Colleges' Association



In the face of severe budget cuts and unprecedented change, the number of good and outstanding colleges has continued to improve. That is a success story and demonstrates the hard work and commitment of all staff working in colleges. The most important ingredient in improving English and maths results is excellent teachers and lecturers. The chief inspector voiced his concerns about the shortage of good teachers and we share this.

BRIAN LIGHTMAN
General secretary, Association of School and College Leaders



It is good news that the proportion of FE and skills providers that were rated good or outstanding increased last year. This means that most learners were at good or outstanding providers, and that inspectors saw better teaching, learning and assessment. Given the massive cuts that have been imposed on the sector, we should be congratulating FE on managing to achieve so much.

DR LYNNE SEDGMORE
Executive director, 157 Group



It is absolutely right that the report highlights the importance of increased attention to staff development as a factor driving College improvement. A world class skills system can only be built on the skills of its teachers. It is particularly welcome that Ofsted have acknowledged the importance of partnerships and the need for local solutions in driving continued improvement and the threat of competition between institutions to that improvement.

STEWART SEGAL
Chief executive, Association of Employment and Learning Providers



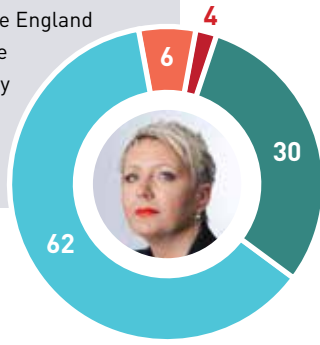
We are pleased Ofsted has recognised that attendance and retention on traineeships was much better than on previous pre-apprenticeship programmes and AELP would argue that a major reason for this was that providers had a much greater input into the new programme's design. Ofsted recognises that changes to government programmes sometimes affect the quality of delivery and in the case of apprenticeships, a period of stability is needed to continue the drive for improvement.

renews questions over engagement

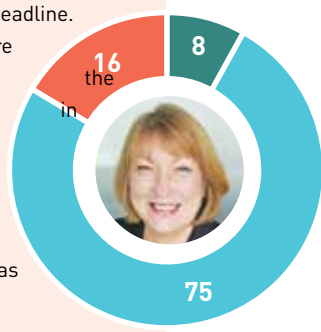
Regional breakdown

The Ofsted report also includes reports from its regional directors showing the differences in FE performance across England. The separate analyses of the sector are brought together here, along with quotes offering a glimpse into how each director sees their region.

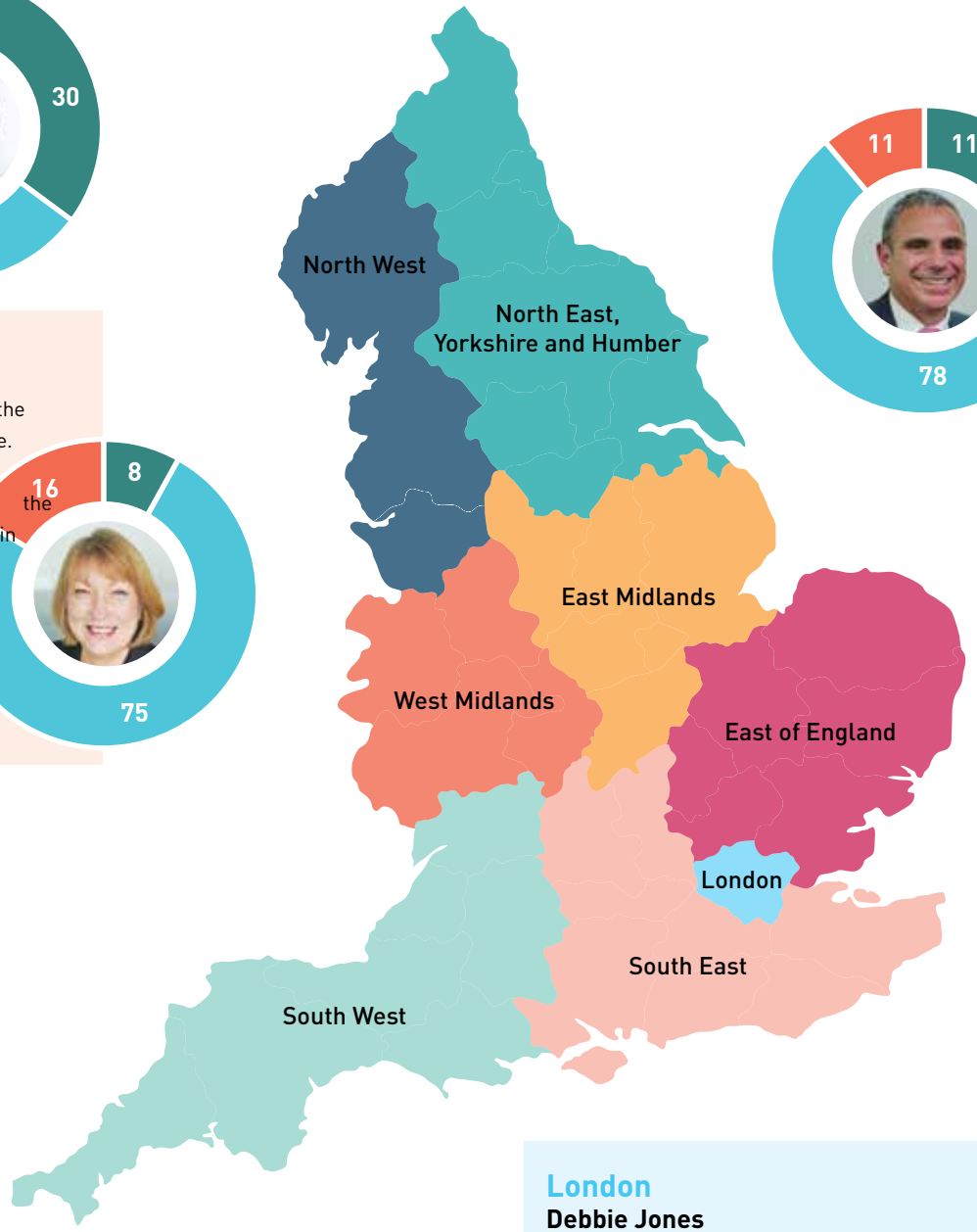
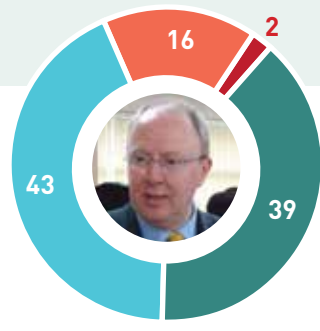
North West
Jo Morgan
Further education and skills provision is strong in the North West.
Ninety per cent of provision is judged to be good or outstanding, which is significantly higher than the England level of 81 per cent. Despite improvements in the quality of teaching, concerns remain about the quality of the curriculum on offer.



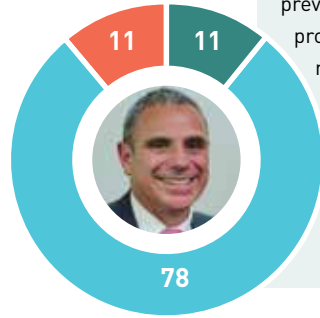
West Midlands
Lorna Fitzjohn
In Ofsted's 2012/13 West Midlands regional report, the poor performance of FE colleges was a key headline. Only 51 per cent of colleges in the region were good or outstanding and the region had highest proportion of inadequate colleges the country. Work has contributed to notable improvements in inspection grades, as confirmed by feedback from providers. In independent learning and community learning and skills providers, performance has remained strong.



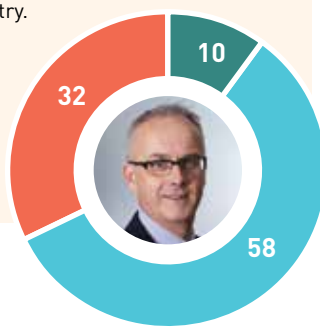
South West
Bradley Simmons
Of the 25 FE and skills providers inspected in 2013/14, seven remained good and nine improved their previous inspection grade. These improving providers were characterised by strong leadership with high expectations, which led to better teaching, learning and assessment.
The five providers that declined to requires improvement or inadequate had weaknesses in leadership and management.



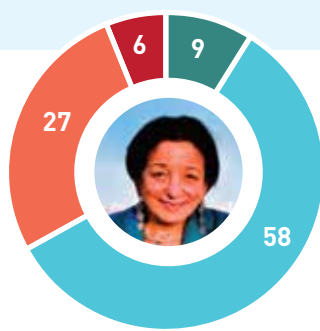
North East, Yorkshire and Humber
Nick Hudson
The proportion of good and outstanding FE colleges is well above the national level and there is a high proportion of outstanding providers. Fewer colleges require improvement than is found nationally. This represents a significant achievement given that the region previously had the second highest proportion of these providers that required improvement.
Improving picture of provision, the proportion of learners attaining level two qualifications, including English and maths, remains too low in most authorities.



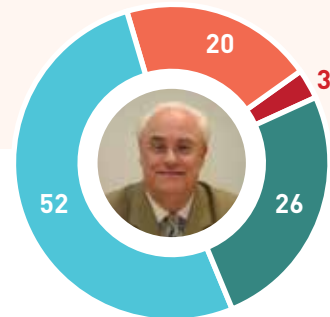
East Midlands
Chris Russell
Eighty-five per cent of colleges in the East Midlands have been judged good or outstanding. However, because some of the weak providers are large, only 68 per cent of learners attend a good or outstanding college. More work remains to be done to help these large providers to improve.
The proportion of learners who achieve a level three qualification by the age of 19 in the East Midlands is among the lowest in the country.



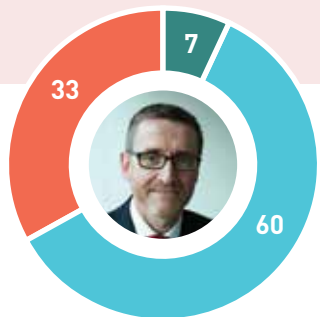
London
Debbie Jones
While the number of learners in good or outstanding provision increased, the pace of improvement was too slow. Of 20 providers inspected who were previously judged to be good or outstanding, 13 received a lower rating, five remained the same and only two improved. Although many providers improved, this was counteracted by others who declined in their effectiveness. As a result, too many learners were still in provision that was less than good.



South East
Sir Robin Bosher
The proportion of FE and skills providers graded good or outstanding at their most recent inspection has continued to rise and the South East performs well when compared with other regions and with England as a whole. However, while this is an improving picture overall, headline data hide some underperformance in individual providers.



East of England
Sean Harford
In terms of the attainment of post-16 learners, the region continues to perform better than the national level, but variations within the region remain.
Learners from low-income backgrounds, however, do worse than the national level for similar learners.
The proportion of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET), at 5.1 per cent in 2013, was the joint third lowest in the country and reduced from 2012.



Key

Proportion of learners at providers per Ofsted grading as at August 31, 2013

Outstanding %	Good %	Requires Improvement %	Inadequate %

Includes general FE (GFE)/tertiary colleges, higher education institutions, independent specialist colleges, sixth form colleges and specialist FE colleges. Source: Ofsted, December 2014

New SFA chief reveals college finance concerns

New Skills Funding Agency (SFA) chief executive Peter Lauener has told of his concern for the future of a “growing number of colleges” running into financial difficulties, in an exclusive interview with *FE Week* editor Chris Henwood.

Mr Lauener, appointed around the start of last month, outlined how “financial strategies” were key in the face of ongoing austerity measures.

In a wide-ranging interview, the first he has given since adding the SFA post to his existing chief executive role at the Education Funding Agency (EFA), he reflected on the scale of college inspections carried out by FE Commissioner Dr David Collins with concerns over bank balances.

He said: “All providers are certainly facing challenges, and we do have concerns about a number of colleges, and the growing number of colleges, and equally I could say in the schools sector there are a number of schools facing financial challenges, and some do have problems, but it is equally the case, coming back to the college sector, there are a number in strong financial health.

“Colleges need to look hard at their financial strategy; they need to look hard at their curriculum resourcing plan and make sure they’ve got a plan that they can afford, and they need to look hard as well at their governance and make sure that the corporation of an FE college, or a sixth form college for that matter, are getting the right regular reports about financial difficulties.”

The vast majority of Dr Collins’ 13 inspections, for which official reports have been published, were triggered by SFA financial concerns and where an Ofsted inspection result triggered his visit, finances were also later identified by the FE Commissioner as an issue.

“It’s not surprising that there would be



Main photo: Peter Lauener
Inset: Lauener, right being interviewed by *FE Week* editor Chris Henwood

more colleges in financial difficulty, given the reduction in budgets, in adult skills budgets, given the fact that the 16 to 19 budget has not been protected in the way that the pre-16 budget has been protected, so it has been, very clearly, a challenging financial position,” said Mr Lauener. He added: “Our analysis indicates a worsening position for colleges in the FE sector and sixth form colleges, and that’s not surprising, given what we’ve talked about, and the workload of the FE Commissioner as a result is significant, as indeed is the workload of the Sixth Form College Commissioner [Peter Mucklow], who is one of my staff in the EFA.

“So there is definitely going to be an

important agenda here over the next few years. In fact, I don’t see this being a ‘we’ll work hard and sort it over the next year’ situation — this needs to be a long-term issue.

“But the prime responsibility rests at corporation level, and I would much rather that these problems were sorted at corporation level. In my view, when there is intervention from the funding agencies, that’s because all the checks and balances in the system have not worked.”

And with further FE and skills cuts widely expected, Mr Lauener had words of budgetary caution. He said: “It would be foolish of any of us to expect that there will

be a sudden loosening of the financial belt after the election — I would take quite the opposite from the broad statements made by the Chancellor [George Osborne] and the Chief Secretary [Danny Alexander] with the Autumn Statement.

“There is a public sector budget deficit that needs to be cut, and politicians from all parties are making it clear that they expect to cut that, to reduce that and eliminate that public sector financial deficit, and it will be very surprising if the post-16 sector was immune from that — I’m certainly not expecting that and I don’t think colleges should plan on that optimistic scenario.”

Peter Lauener in the FE Week spotlight

You’ve been at the SFA for around six weeks now. How are you finding the workload with your existing role at the EFA?

I’m certainly finding time is under a lot of pressure. Having said that, I’ve got two teams of very strong directors, and I wouldn’t have been able to take on this role without very strong people working for me, so that allows me to focus my time on what I think is most important.

What are your thoughts on the recent National Audit Office report that spoke of streamlining education and training funding systems?

If I look at the SFA and the EFA, they have done similar things in the territory of improving the IT systems, the platform on which we operate, so we both developed online account systems for the organisations that we fund. One question is could we bring these together? I think putting it a little bit more widely, and not just about the IT systems but about the systems that we use to fund. I think one of the questions I would certainly want to look at is whether there is scope for simplification in the SFA systems.

We’ve done quite a lot in recent years, partly because of the Alison Wolf agenda, to simplify some of the post-16 education funding agency systems, they’re massively simpler than they used to be, and that’s allowed us to streamline the data requirements of the sector from the EFA. I would certainly like to have a look at the scope for doing that in the SFA as well.

You mentioned IT systems, but this will send shivers down the spine of MIS officers up and down the country based on their experiences with Fis, Lars and the Hub. How can you assure them that they’re not in for more problems?

Things definitely went wrong in the last year. I’ve just had, in the last few days, a report on RO4 this year, because I asked to be kept up to date with my SFA and EFA hat on, and the reports are pretty encouraging, that the returns have worked to a good quality and consistent standard. So I think those problems are behind us, but I will certainly continue to look with my colleagues very closely at that, and there’s been a lot of work over the last year on the systems implementation, and I think we’re in a good position, a much better

position than a year ago. But this will remain high on my radar for two reasons. One is a basic credibility thing — people expect a funding agency to be able to manage its data well. And people expect a funding agency to get the money out, but these are basic core licence to practice things. So before we do anything fancy we need to make sure we’re doing the basics now.

Are there any plans for a single funding system?

This is not about a merger of the organisations. I’ve not taken the job because of that, nor is there a plan to merge the organisations. Many of the organisations that the EFA and the SFA fund are the same; colleges, charitable and commercial providers, many of the partners and stakeholders are the same, so there is definitely scope for doing things simpler, better, better together, more effectively in the future, and I am obviously very keen to explore that.

We recently reported how providers were not complying with SFA rules on declaring subcontractor arrangements and, where they had, fees of up to 40 per cent were

being charged. What are your thoughts on this?

I can’t say what we were doing in any particular case, but I do believe in transparency on these matters. Actually, there are many cases where you get a prime contractor/sub-contractor relationship which is entirely beneficial and allows organisations to play a part who haven’t got the capacity, or indeed the capability, and possibly not even the inclination to put in place all the QA arrangements and management information returns, they just want to do a particular thing.

A prime contractor can agree a wider range of functions with sub-contractors, and I don’t believe we should be laying down a very precise template and charging regime. Having said that, it would find it quite hard to see a set of arrangements that would justify a 40 per cent management fee, because it’s kind of obvious that what is taken as a management fee is not going to frontline education or training.

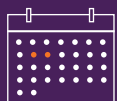
Visit feweek.co.uk for the extended Q&A with Mr Lauener.



FE Week Annual Apprenticeship Conference and Exhibition 2015

Supporting apprenticeship providers during a time of major reform

DATE:



March 9 to 10, 2015

VENUE:



Venue: Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, Westminster, London

Confirmed Speakers



Jennifer Coupland

Deputy Director, Joint Apprenticeships Unit, Department for business, Innovation and Skills/DFE



Nick Linford

Director of LSECT Ltd, former editor of FE Week



Sue Husband

Director of the National Apprenticeship Service

More speakers to be announced

The FE Week Annual Apprenticeship Conference and exhibition 2015 (AAC2015) will provide an unprecedented opportunity for those involved with the delivery of apprenticeships to come together to learn, share and debate during a time of major reform and on the eve of a General Election.

Taking place on the first two days of National Apprenticeship Week (March 9 to 10, 2015) and in partnership with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), the conference will offer a mixture of key note speeches from Government Ministers and Shadow Cabinet members, to in-depth practical sessions with Nick Linford and other technical specialists.

This is a not to be missed two-day policy and practice conference.

For more information and to register visit **feweekaac2015.co.uk**

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Alternative needed before QCF ends, Ofqual warned

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Ofqual has been warned it needs an alternative system in place when it scraps the qualifications and credit framework (QCF).

The qualifications watchdog confirmed on Monday (December 8) that, following a 12-week consultation launched in July, it would remove the QCF rules.

The removal of the rules, along with the QCF bank of shared units, will begin from summer next year, following further consultation on technical details.

Jeremy Benson, Ofqual's executive director for vocational qualifications, said the "QCF 'one-size-fits-all' approach just isn't right for every qualification".

Graham Hasting-Evans, NOCN managing director said: "As we head towards 2015, with the general election in May, we have created a confused and fragmented set of governmental initiatives for vocational skills and qualifications which risk undermining confidence in the system.

"In our view you cannot just withdraw the QCF without putting in place an alternative which provides the UK with an internationally recognised qualifications' framework.

"Accordingly we now need to focus on establishing a National Qualifications Framework for England which includes common vocational skills such as English, maths and IT, employability skills, apprenticeships, higher apprenticeship, NVQs, GCSEs, A-level and degrees all in a single framework."

The consultation on the QCF, which was launched in 2008, proposed that qualifications be regulated by Ofqual's general conditions of recognition.

It was, according to an Ofqual spokesperson, driven partly by the need to put a new approach in place to support the government's Raising the Participation Age policy.

A second, Guided Learning Hours (GLH), consultation put forward changes to awarding organisations' estimates of the size of their qualifications and



Jeremy Benson

THE NEXT STAGES

Ofqual has announced that in early 2015, it will publish plans for implementation of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) changes and hold another consultation.

It had initially planned to wind down unit-sharing and close the QCF unit bank in January, but some respondents to the initial consultation asked for more time to plan.

As a result, Ofqual does not expect to withdraw the QCF rules, close the unit bank, end unit sharing or make any other changes before summer 2015.

Once the rules are removed, awarding organisations will continue to follow their own development processes and Ofqual's general conditions, without needing to also meet the over-arching principles of the QCF.

the descriptions of size they use.

Meanwhile, other proposals in the QCF consultation include ending the requirement for awarding organisations to share units as well as maintaining options for awarding organisations to design qualifications broken down into units.

Kirstie Donnelly, UK managing director of City & Guilds, said: "It's great that we're moving away from the QCF. Its rigid, 'one-size-fits-all' approach was far too restrictive, meaning it could never fully meet the needs of employers.

"Although it's yet more change in a sector that has seen ongoing churn and turbulence, this is a change that was much needed. Let's take the opportunity to learn from the past and create a framework that enables further education to better meet the needs of individuals, businesses and the economy."

Charlotte Bosworth



(pictured), OCR director of skills and employment, said: "We welcome the proposal to withdraw the regulatory arrangements for the QCF and to regulate using only the general conditions of recognition.

"However, during the implementation of the changes we must not lose sight of what is really important — preparing young people for further study and the world of work and helping them reach their potential. We must manage the changes carefully so that we do not jeopardise comparability."

A spokesperson for Pearson said: "The removal of these framework rules will give us more freedom to continue to develop qualifications that students, providers and employers can value and have confidence in."

See page 17 for expert pieces by former Ofqual accreditation manager Jim Proudfoot and Federation of Awarding Bodies chief executive Stephen Wright, and fewweek.co.uk for a piece by Charlotte Bosworth from OCR

Cable concession on 'two million' apprentice claims

Government claims to have overseen the two millionth apprentice start have been met with caution after Business Secretary Vince Cable conceded around one-in-four learners may not stay the course.

Dr Cable announced the milestone figure, achieved during the course of this parliament, while on a visit to Oxford on Monday (December 8) to meet Paige McConville.

She started the two millionth apprenticeship, in advanced engineering manufacturing with employers FMB and provider Abindgdon and Witney College, in August.

But in an interview with *FE Week*, Dr Cable conceded that not all the vaunted starts would lead to completions, and he accepted the figure included multiple starts per learner and frameworks of less than 12 months' duration that were outlawed early on in the Parliament.

He said: "We can't be absolutely confident because of course not all are completed. The completion rate for apprenticeships generally, and I'm going across all levels, is about 73 per cent. It has been up and down around that level for the past five years. Some people start them and do not complete them. The basic numerical narrative is we have started the two millionth apprentice and that is the number of starts over the last parliament. So far we will have completed over one million apprenticeships, but you won't see the full effects of the starts for a few years."

Statistical First Release (SFR) figures indicate that there have been around 1.99m apprentice starts during current parliament, which started around the fourth quarter of 2009/10. But the two million figure is expected to be listed in the next SFR, due late next month. It comes against the backdrop of a second consecutive annual fall in the number of apprentice starts with 2013/14 down nearly 70,000 on the previous year. All-age apprenticeship starts were at 440,400 last academic year, having been at 510,200 the previous year, and 520,600 in 2011/12.

Nevertheless, Mick Fletcher, a founder member of the Policy Consortium, said the two million figure was impressive, but he warned against "headline-chasing statistics". "The figures are for starts when what matters is successful completion, ideally with progression into sustainable employment," he said.

"According to the latest figures fewer than three quarters of apprentices successfully completed their programme and of those who completed only around two thirds were kept on by their employer. The figure of 2m starts is still impressive, but only achieved by including programmes that are no longer recognised as apprenticeships — those lasting less than six months for example. This explains why despite meeting the target the trend in numbers is downwards.

"Moreover many members of the public would be surprised to learn that nearly half of the total are not young people starting their working life as ministers imply but adults, mainly over the age of 25 and in many cases already employed.

"Political leaders of all colours deserve credit for their consistent support for the apprenticeship programme but their enthusiasm for headline-chasing statistics risks devaluing their real achievements."

Scrapping the QCF: how the sector responded

Teresa Frith, Association of Colleges senior skills policy manager

"The removal of the additional rules surrounding unit-based qualifications will enable colleges to work with awarding organisations to create qualifications that will help both adults and young people gain the skills required for the modern workplace.

"The offer can now be about meeting these needs rather than QCF rules."

Nigel Whitehead, a UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) commissioner and managing director of BAE Systems [whose government-commissioned review last year, recommended an end to the public funding of 95 per cent of the 19,000-plus adult vocational qualifications on offer]

"Qualifications must be high quality, flexible

and responsive to employer needs. My review found that the QCF rules have been responsible for a rigid tick-box approach to assessment. Rules on unit-sharing have reduced employer involvement and sector expertise in qualifications.

"I am fully supportive of Ofqual's new approach to regulating vocational qualifications, which puts employer involvement at its heart.

"The UKCES and Ofqual are working together to put in place the conditions that allow employers to take an effective and directive role at the centre of the vocational qualifications system."

Stewart Segal, chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP)

"We would hope that the removal of the regulatory arrangements for the QCF next summer does not lead to a proliferation of the general conditions, which would create

an additional regulatory burden for awarding organisations. Providers should be reassured that they are not looking at significant changes to the qualifications they are currently using.

David Hughes, chief executive of the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, said:

"This announcement by Ofqual does not prevent qualifications retaining the accessibility, affordability and flexibility of unit-based delivery but it does remove the requirement. We will work with awarding organisations and learning providers to make sure that they recognise the demand and the power of a unit-based offer, particularly up to level two.

"We know through our work that this has been particularly effective for unemployed people and offenders and will work with adults who want and need to get back into learning."

MPs told 16 to 18 apprentice reforms could hit numbers

@REBECCAKCOONEY
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The number of 16 to 18 apprenticeships offered from employers could fall as a direct result of proposed reforms, the House of Commons Education Committee has heard.

A panel of sector experts told MPs on the committee that the government's decision to re-design frameworks in consultation with employers and route funding through employers, rather than providers, would increase the quality of apprenticeships.

But they also warned reform proposals, which further include an "enforced" employer's fee for 16 and 17-year-old learners, could put employers off.

The comments came on Wednesday (December 10) with the committee investigating apprenticeships for 16 to 18-year-olds.

Paul Champion, assistant principal for work-based learning at Chesterfield College said: "I think they're going to reduce the number of people trained — I think they're going to squeeze the opportunities for young people to get those skills, because they need to get them in business."

Steve Radley, director of policy and strategic planning for the Construction Industry Training Board agreed, saying reforms "could cause smaller firms to walk away".

He added: "You're getting small firms to focus on dealing with bureaucracy whereas



they should be left to deal with what they do best which is driving up the quality of the experience."

However, Federation of Small Businesses policy adviser for education and business support Dan Hooper said he would be prepared to accept a reduction in number in exchange "for the increase the quality".

He added: "The government doesn't seem to have a clear vision of what happens when the Trailblazers end and employers then take control of the standards.

"Small businesses will be cast aside, therefore the quality wanted and expected from small firms won't be there."

FE consultant Mark Corney warned against the effect the "enforced fee" would have when it was proposed in a technical consultation in March. At the time, Mr Corney told *FE Week* the move would "kill off apprenticeships for 16 and 17 year olds".

He added: "Why would you think imposing any charge whatsoever on 16-year-olds will increase employer demand?"

Nevertheless, the panel also warned former Education Secretary Michael Gove's reforms

to the English GCSE syllabus could have a knock-on effect on apprenticeships.

All learners who have not gained a GCSE maths or English grade C by the age of 16 must work towards it alongside their chosen post-16 programme.

However, UCU general secretary Sally Hunt said: "The new English GCSEs focus more towards literature — 19th Century literature and Shakespeare — for students who've already struggled with GCSEs, that's creating a barrier."

Kate Stock, managing director of Smart Training, agreed, saying: "We already have an alternative programme, it's called Functional Skills and it's much more relevant to the actual workplace the learner is in, and it works."

Skills Minister Nick Boles has stepped away from his predecessor Matthew Hancock's decision to scrap Functional Skills, and is currently considering a rebrand.

No date for the committee's next hearing has been set, and the results of the government's technical consultation, due around a month ago, are yet to be published.

Stability hopes with quals lists for 2017 tables

The publication of official lists of technical and vocational qualifications that will figure in 2017 performance tables has been welcomed with the hope it might bring "relative stability".

The Department for Education has updated its lists of new technical certificates for 16 to 19-year-olds, technical awards for 14 to 16-year-olds and A-level equivalent Tech-levels taught up to the age of 19. The 625 qualifications listed are approved for teaching from September and represent a significant fall from the 5,000-plus that could previously be included in performance tables.

Lynne Sedgmore, 157 Group executive director, said: "The publication of the full lists of vocational qualifications which will count towards league tables from 2017 at long last brings the prospect of relative stability in the FE and skills sector.

"What we now need is for politicians to give the sector the time to allow these qualifications to become embedded in the system so that the benefits of vocational learning are clear to students, teachers and employers."

Tech-level qualifications were announced by the government in July last year to sit alongside the A-level academic route.

The Association of Colleges declined to comment.

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FE WEEK COMMENT

A job for now or job skills for life?

Just under a year ago *FE Week* reported how Job Centre Plus (JCP) staff were turning 18 and 19-year-olds away from traineeships because enrolment would put their benefits at risk.

So it's an odd situation to now hear of JCP staff having apparently turned potential enrolments away from the programme because it might actually extend their time claiming benefits.

This would have presumably taken place because chasing a job, any job, might appear more attractive to JCP staff than claimants developing lifelong employability skills while remaining in receipt of benefits.

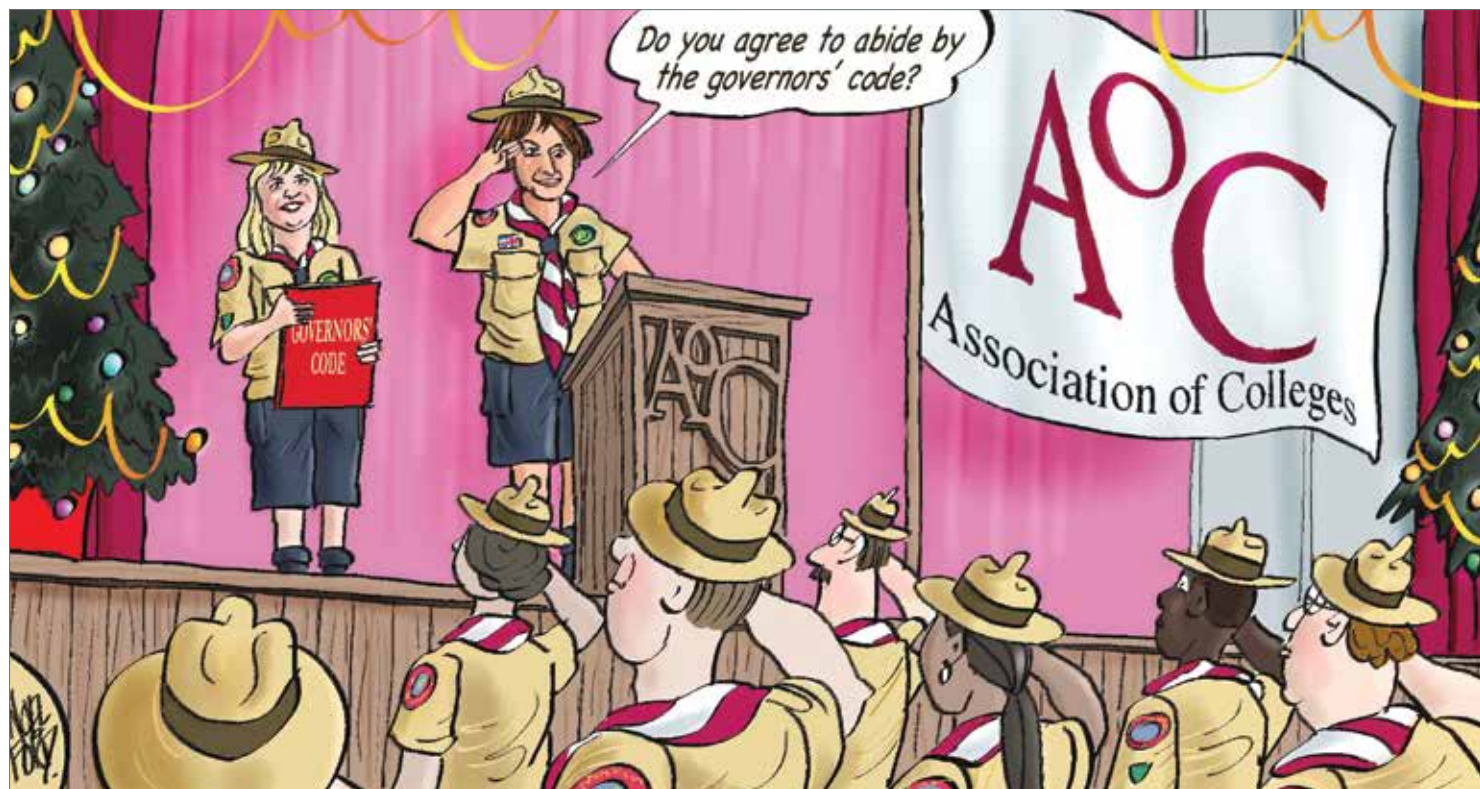
But, in the week Ofsted revealed its view of traineeships as being one in which "the numbers involved are extremely low," we learn the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) now appears on board to push the programme.

Its target (let's not kid ourselves it's anything else) of 10,000 referrals will come as welcome news to the providers putting their time and effort into a programme that should always have had the full backing of those in charge of JCP staff.

These are the very staff who regularly deal with those for whom the traineeship programme was developed — young people with little or no job experience and employability skills. It's wrong to deny these people the chance to develop the essential skills to win and hold down a job.

Chris Henwood

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College governors get AoC code preview

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The Association of Colleges (AoC) has launched a consultation on a proposed new code of governance for English colleges.

Ex-head of FE and skills investment and performance at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) Dr Susan Pember (pictured left), who is now AoC governance adviser, has spent the last six months travelling the country collecting ideas on what should feature in the code from more than 250 governors and other sector leaders.

A draft version of the code was sent to colleges and other bodies with an interest in the sector including BIS, the Education Funding Agency, Skills Funding Agency, Ofsted, the National Union of Students and the University and College Union on Wednesday (December 10).

It was accompanied by a letter from AoC chair Carole Stott (pictured right) inviting principals and chairs of governors to submit their views on the document.

In the letter, Ms Stott

said: "The new code should not be seen as supporting a 'tick box' approach, and boards are encouraged to adopt its spirit as well as its letter. By adopting the code, you can demonstrate leadership and stewardship in relation to your college help protect its reputation and that of the wider sector and give key stakeholders and partner's confidence in our self-regulation."

The original AoC code of governance, for general FE and sixth form colleges, was published in 2009. Ms Stott added that there were now "higher expectations on Ofsted's part about the role of governors in overseeing quality improvement". "With the continuing trend for greater transparency and 'student/customer' protection, I cannot stress enough the importance of being proactive in providing this assurance if we are to avoid future legislative or regulatory creep," she said.

The draft version of the updated code sets out 10 principles for good governance, including that each board should set "the mission,

vision and strategy including defining the ethos of the college" and make "all final decisions on all matters of fundamental concern".

It added they should be responsive to the labour market, develop a financial strategy to ensure the long-term solvency of their colleges and ensure that "due diligence takes place in relation to subcontracting and partnership activity". It also said that boards should "foster exceptional teaching and learning and financial management by using best practice when selecting and recruiting the senior leadership team" and follow this up with "rigorous" performance management.

Dr Pember said: "This new values-based code of good governance will bring about a step change in governance. It has been developed through an open process with over 250 sector governors, clerks and senior leaders contributing to the principles and drafting.

We believe this is a code for the sector by the sector."

Visit feweek.co.uk to see the draft code in full, and to respond to the consultation email governance.code@aoc.co.uk before it ends on March 5.



COMMENTS

Professor Wolf tells of 'unease' at 16-19 GCSE exemption

I was equally horrified at this announcement but even more so when I realised that GCSE Literature was going to be credited for students who have not achieved a C in GCSE English language.

Whose ill thought-out idea was this? Young people may be unable to apply for jobs or university places because they have not achieved one of the government's key qualifications.

Is this a case of the tail wagging the dog as schools and colleges may well be unhappy about accommodating the numbers who need to compete English and maths GCSEs as co-requisites for level three courses? Poor policy, poor decisions and eventually poor outcomes for students.

Will Doone

Bank of BIS launches emergency college loans

We are an Ofsted grade two independent learning provider. Our Skills Funding Agency audit proved that we were spending government money wisely. We have never gone to the bank to ask for a loan.

The world really has gone bonkers
Chrys Kemp

We are grade one and totally agree [with Chrys Kemp].

Wonder if the college principal will be required to give a personal guarantee and put their house on the line or even their pension — doubt it; and all these colleges get capital grants, exempt practically from all of business rates which costs us £m per annum and they still can't make the

books balance.

Maybe new principals of the future need to be coached not by old principals on consultancy contracts as well as their pensions but by business people who understand cash flow management.

Peter Marples

Gazelle departures prompt membership review

About time. Now perhaps they can focus on the forth E they missed in their three-Es mantra — "Education"?

Perhaps take the membership fee from remaining principals' current salaries and make it performance-related on outcomes improvement since joining? — Now that's enterprising.

paul

TOP OFSTED ANNUAL REPORT TWEETS

@157Group
Is helping 17% of learners to get a C in English and maths — who failed to in school — a success or a failure?
#OfstedAR14

@ty_goddard
#OfstedAR14 : "vocational education cannot be seen as it too often is today, as a second-rate alternative for other people's children."

@ASCL_UK
Increase in FE providers judged good/outstanding at last inspection. Shows improvement in teaching quality, learning&assessment. #OfstedAR14

@EducatingLDN
Ofstednews: FE & skills annual report draws on more than 400 inspections
#OfstedAR14

@AELPUK
Attendance & retention on @TraineeshipsGov much better than on previous pre-@Apprenticeships programmes, reports @Ofstednews
#OfstedAR14

'Outstanding' indie hosts lavish Lords awards event

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An independent learning provider rated as outstanding by Ofsted impressed high-achieving apprentices and employers by holding its annual awards ceremony in grand surroundings at Westminster.

Aspire, Achieve, Advance (3aaa), given its grade one rating across all headline fields last month, held its annual awards ceremony in the Cholmondeley Room at The House Of Lords on Thursday (December 4).

Company owners Peter Marples and Di McEvoy-Robinson hosted the event and awards were handed out by Baroness Kennedy, chair of the Helena Kennedy Foundation, Shaun Barker, club captain of Derby County Football Club, and Wayne Madsen and Tom Poynton, first team players from Derbyshire County Cricket Club.

The provider's eight top apprentices (see right) and a number of firms that employ 3aaa apprentices, including London-based IT infrastructure services firm Computacenter, Derbyshire-based Darley Dale Medical Centre, Sheffield-based website design company Castus. Ms McEvoy-Robinson told guests at the ceremony: "We are very proud today to be celebrating success today. One of the key reasons for our outstanding [Ofsted] grade is our fantastic employers and apprentices. We have more than 2,000 apprentices and couldn't bring them all along today, but are proud to recognise our top achievers."



From left: Professional cricketer Tom Poynton, Castus apprentice Laura Martin, aged 23, cricketer Wayne Madsen, Baroness Kennedy, Castus apprentice Alex Bellis, 21, Gary Hides, Castus senior manager, professional footballer Shaun Barker, and 3aaa owners Peter Marples and Di McEvoy-Robinson



From left: Computacenter apprentice Lewis Conophy, aged 20, Baroness Kennedy, Computacenter apprentice Andrew Colbran, 25, Computacenter UK manager Kelvin Hughes, Ms McEvoy-Robinson, Mr Barker, Computacenter senior manager Bhupendra Hirani, and Mr Marples



From left: Mr Madsen, Baroness Kennedy, Mr Barker, Melissa Smith, and Darley Dale Medical Centre practice manager Nicola Bromirski

Mariam Suleman, aged 18
Employer: Bay Accountancy
Training centre: Birmingham Academy
Apprenticeship: Level three accountancy

Paige Nolan, 18
Employer: B & M Stores
Training centre: Liverpool Academy
Apprenticeship: Level three accountancy

Lisa Jarvis, 20
Employer: CSC
Training centre: Manchester Academy
Apprenticeship: Level three IT

Luke Sanders, 19
Employer: Aldi Stores
Training centre: Tamworth Academy
Apprenticeship: Level three IT

Richard Morris, 18
Employer: ASD Solutions
Training centre: Derby Academy
Apprenticeship: Level three IT

Ryan Scales, 21
Employer: Ocado
Training centre: Watford Academy
Apprenticeship: Level three IT

Melissa Smith, 20
Employer: Darley Dale Medical Centre
Training centre: Nottingham Academy
Apprenticeship: Level three digital marketing & social media

Amy Allsobrook, 21
Employer: 3aaa
Training centre: Derby Academy
Apprenticeship: Level three digital marketing & social media

'Relentless' drive to improve standards

Co-owner of 3aaa Di McEvoy-Robinson speaks to FE Week reporter Paul Offord about the grade one achievement and other FE and skills issues

How did 3aaa prepare for the Ofsted inspection?

We didn't know the inspection was coming, as you only get two days' notice. But we knew one was due, so made sure all the checks and balances were in place to maintain our high standards.

We have a formal board. I lead a sub-group of that board for quality and standards which I chair every month and the key people in the business have to be accountable for improvements. We are relentless.

We also track the performance and support needed by our apprentices closely and have always observed our trainers and assessors and given immediate feedback. If they are observed by our internal quality team and they achieve a grade one rating for the learning they provide, they are rewarded with a £300 payment. We also celebrate that with a little story about them in our weekly newsletter.

In addition to that, we bring in external inspectors to check what we are doing. We don't just assume our internal processes are good enough.

What grade did you get in self-assessment before the Ofsted visit?

We [recently] self-graded a level one in all of the key areas. However, only a year ago, we had self-assessed at a level two and everybody in the organisation had a little

part to play in thinking about how we could improve.

How can you improve further?

I think to improve further we need to look down the track and say what is going to be important in teaching, learning and assessment? How, for example, is social media and technology going to have an impact?

One of the key things is bringing in young people — so that's, for example, 18 to 19-year-olds coming in and delivering technology training. It is so exciting what is happening with technology and they understand it best.

Would the result have been the same if your subcontracted work had been taken into account in Ofsted grading?

We don't subcontract our own training, but we work as a subcontractor to other colleges where we run training academies and the standards are exactly the same as for the rest of the business. We, for example, work with Bedford College which funds our Milton Keynes Academy and was inspected by Ofsted as part of the overall grade one inspection.

What management fees does 3aaa charge?

As I said, we don't subcontract ourselves, but no-one who we do subcontracting work for charges us more than 15 per cent. A 40 per cent management fee would be extortionate.



Paul Offord interviews Di McEvoy-Robinson

What are your views on the government's planned apprentice funding reforms and potentially routing funding through employers?

The voice of small and medium-sized enterprises who deliver more than 65 per cent of new apprenticeship starts appears to have been lost in the debate and they certainly do not want the additional bureaucracy involved in the planned reforms. We believe that employer contributions should be increased through a measured and incremental

increase in apprenticeship wages.

Should Ofsted take greater account of providers' financial situation when it inspects?

Ofsted should undoubtedly take account of the financial state of organisations it inspects. The FE Commissioner's recent report highlighted key issues that need to be in place to provide all-round assurance to the funding bodies and more importantly to the tax payer, that Ofsted grades reflect strong and sustainable organisations.

PROFILE



Being able to create something from scratch that then is going to have a positive impact on many people who you won't ever even meet, that clicked with me quite quickly and obviously stayed with me



A CREDIT TO VOCATIONAL LEA

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As far as student debt goes, City & Guilds UK managing director Kirstie Donnelly is more qualified than most to sympathise with today's hard-pressed learners struggling to stay out of the red.

Just ask the manager of the Natwest bank that held her account during her days as an English literature student at the University of Manchester.

"The bank manager told me and my dad [Brian] that I probably had one of the worst student debts at the time," explains 54-year-old Donnelly.

"I remember he suggested to me and my dad that I shouldn't bank with them again, and my dad did say: 'I think you might regret that one day'."

But Donnelly's financial situation was not born of profligacy.

"The reason is I didn't get a grant," she explains. "My dad was funding three of us [Donnelly is one of four siblings], but he

couldn't actually afford to. Even though we were all working to try to fund ourselves, it was still accumulating."

However, Donnelly's efforts to pay her own way through university were nothing new.

At the tender age of 11, she had an after-school job picking lettuce in the village where she lived, just outside Southport, in Lancashire.

"I have always liked working," says Donnelly, now a resident of Hampstead, in London.

"But of course, it was different then, there weren't the same compliance issues and I think that's really quite hard for young people today."

At 16, she got a job on a campsite in France, without telling mum Jill and dad.

"When I had finished my O-levels, I remember going in and saying: 'I'm going to France tomorrow'. My parents were absolutely horrified," she says.

"But they had the good sense, because they were quite liberal, to let me go, once they knew that it had all been arranged properly.

"Clearly, there was something going on in my head which was about wanting to be part of some world of work, really."

Her work ethic, she says, comes partly from her parents.

Jill, who died 10 years ago, was "a fantastic woman", says Donnelly, who taught children with special educational needs, while Brian was also a teacher.

"He's 78 now and retired but he still does things, he goes off to Africa on education projects and he does things locally," she says.

With two older brothers, Matt and Tim, and a younger brother, Nick, Donnelly says she grew up in a "very male" household.

"It was quite robust, I suppose I did get special treatment, but only sometimes," she says. "But I also had to learn how to play football as well."

And learning to play football may well have proved more enjoyable than the world of education that Donnelly now calls home, career-wise. Indeed, she looks slightly sheepish as she admits: "Funnily enough,

I don't know that I loved school — or education generally.

"I feel awful saying that because I was privileged enough to go all the way right through to university."

Donnelly went to university having completed her A-levels at Runshaw College, in Lancashire. During the uni holidays, she worked in France and on a Dutch tulip farm.

"I've done some awful menial jobs in my time — whatever it took to earn some money. But I enjoyed what came with that — travelling, meeting new people," she says.

"I realised that it wasn't just an isolated environment like at university."

However, despite her exposure to the world of work, she wasn't sure what she wanted to do in the days after giving her university bank manager nightmares.

"I don't think I ever had a clear pattern in my head really," she says.

"I was always quite envious when you hear people say, 'I am going to be...' and then you meet them later on and they actually did it.



EARNING

It's a personal thing

What is your favourite book, and why?

I really love Middlemarch by George Eliot, but equally I was a great fan when Bridget Jones first came out, and I used to collect the columns when it was in the Guardian as a weekly column. Also one of the really good books I've read very recently which really struck with me was Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal? by Jeanette Winterson

What do you do to switch off from work?

In the week, it's difficult. I have a dog called Sue-Ellen so I love spending time walking. I love living in London, so I do a lot of walking around, lots of theatre. I like swimming, but I don't do enough of it

What's your pet hate?

It's probably people being rude and dismissive, and then the other one I probably don't like is people who are disingenuous or insincere. Just generally people being rude or discourteous to others. There's just no need for it in this day and age

If you could invite anyone to a dinner party, living or dead, who would it be?

My mum — she was great at dinner parties and I so miss having our chats together and Captain Hardy, partly to find out if he did kiss Lord Nelson but more to discover if the family legend about him being an ancestor of ours is true

What did you want to be when you grew up?

I never really had a burning desire to be a fire fighter or a nurse or a doctor. I knew that I wanted to travel — I was probably quite interested in journalism actually. I started thinking about things like child psychology

rehabilitation charity Nacro before moving to the Manchester Training and Enterprise Council (Tec).

One of the themes in Donnelly's career, she says, has been around change, not surprising in a sector that's forever shifting and reforming — but it is something Donnelly thrives on.

"The common thread is in every role I have had is probably being a change agent — but transformation and change is something that always is of interest to me, although not for the sake of it, but where it's needed, where you can see opportunities to make something better," she says.

Her 10 years at Manchester Tec gave her experience doing "some real leading edge things in a public sector setting, but with a very clear commercial bias — it's a very important blend that we need to have in our sector really".

"I don't know why people sometimes have such a problem with commerciality within a public sector, because I think it's important," she says.



"As long as what is happening with those commercial outputs is then still driving that agenda, I think it's a good thing."

When the Tec was disbanded "on a political whim" in 2001 Donnelly decided to pursue her burgeoning interest in technology and education, at Video Arts, a producing training videos, as they made the move from VHS to digital.

It was there she met civil partner of 14 years Nat, who left the company shortly after Donnelly arrived and now works for the Children's Food Trust, where she teaches children and families about healthy cooking and eating.

After Video Arts, Donnelly was headhunted to work for Learndirect, where she stayed for eight years until it was sold in 2011.

Getting the MBE for services to e-learning the same year, she says, was surprisingly enjoyable.

"I wasn't hugely bothered about it but you go to the palace and they really do make it very special," she says.

For Donnelly, the move to City & Guilds felt like the "natural thing to do".

"I am quite an intuitive and instinctive person and years before I'd visited City & Guilds and I remember just fleetingly thinking, 'I can see myself working here'," she says.

Looking back at her own career, which began with her not knowing what options were open to her, she says she can see where her interest in policy came from.

"I have been shaped by what's happened to me, and they have been positive experiences by and large, but I therefore do feel really passionate about people having more choice, and that choice being earlier, about people having much more access to work experience," explains Donnelly.

In terms of careers advice, she says: "I just think is an absolute travesty that we continue to talk about it yet ignore it. And yet actually if we did it properly and we did it well, then would it not actually end up being a prevention, rather than a very expensive cure?"

NEWS

‘Dear Santa...’ the sector’s

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With a general election, tightening funding and the ongoing apprenticeship reforms, next year looks set to be a turbulent one for the FE and

skills sector, as well as the country at large. But with the festive season of goodwill approaching, we asked familiar faces from across the sector what they’d like see under the FE Christmas tree for next year. This is just a sneak peak at some of their

replies — visit www.feweek.co.uk to see them all. And whatever 2015 does bring, the team here at *FE Week* would like to wish everyone in the sector a very merry Christmas and a happy New Year.





Jeremy Benson
Executive director for vocational qualifications, Ofqual



This year at Ofqual we’ve sharply increased our focus on vocational qualifications. We want awarding organisations to demonstrate their qualifications meet the needs of employers. We’re working with vocational education partners and changing how we regulate to achieve that.

In 2015, we will continue this work,

so people can value and trust vocational qualifications. There are many really good qualifications, but we’ll expect improvements to be made where they’re needed.

But first, we have the festive season to celebrate. I want to wish all *FE Week* readers a very Merry Christmas. We’ll see you in 2015 for an exciting New Year.




Graham Hasting-Evans
Managing director at NOCN




It’s been an interesting and challenging year for the education sector and as 2014 draws to a close our thoughts turn to our Christmas wish list and what we can expect from Skills Minister Nick Boles (the man who can grant our wishes) over the next 12 months.

Our top three wishes for 2015 are more investment in skills and a re-think on funding, recognition that employability skills are essential at all levels, not just entry level and a ramping up of the number of ‘reformed’ apprenticeships that are approved and can be delivered.




Dr Mary Bousted
General secretary of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers




ATL is hoping hard that the FE and skills sector doesn’t face any further budget cuts in the year ahead, but fear that is unlikely. FE and sixth form colleges have borne the brunt of a massive reduction in funding, particularly for education and training for the over 19s, which makes it harder for

unemployed young people to acquire the skills they need to get a job.

The Government should get its priorities right, stop wasting money on school places where they aren’t needed, and focus attention on a sector that has already been battered by cuts.



Sally Hunt
General secretary, University and College Union



We have considerable a Christmas wish list this year, with decent funding for FE at the top. We also want the government to extend its teacher workload initiative to FE and not treat FE teachers like second class citizens.

The time has come for the sector to phase out unpopular graded lesson observations.

Finally, we would like to see an end to FE loans, which are behind a shocking drop in adult learner numbers, and a complete rethink of the entire FE funding system.

We will be very interested to hear what politicians of all stripes have to say ahead of the election.




Martin Doel
Chief executive at the Association of Colleges




Here at the Association of Colleges we wish college staff and everyone in the FE sector a relaxing and peaceful Christmas. We want to recognise the contribution that colleges have made to their students and their local communities.

The New Year will bring new challenges as the country prepares for the General Election in May but I have no doubt that colleges will approach this important year with the same level of enthusiasm as they do with everything.



David Hughes
Chief executive of the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education



Giving people more control over their learning would be the perfect Christmas gift.


A nicely wrapped skills account for every adult would empower them to make the right choices over the learning that they want and need to do.

People of all ages and stages need to train,

retrain and stay in work longer.

Incentivising people to build the skills and confidence they need to progress in their careers will help employers improve productivity and will also increase pay.

Good news for the economy and people’s life chances.



Lorna Fitzjohn
Ofsted director for FE and skills




I will remember 2014 first and foremost as the year which I took up the mantle as Ofsted’s director for FE and skills.

It has been wonderful to meet and work with so many committed people in the sector who are helping to raise standards.


Your achievement is evident by the fact that

more learners are now in good or outstanding provision than this time last year. For this the sector needs commending.

I would like to wish everyone a very happy holiday. We have achieved many great things this year and I am already looking forward to what more we can achieve in the New Year.



Sue Husband
Director of the National Apprenticeship Service



Merry Christmas everyone.

It was recently announced that we, collectively, have supported two million apprenticeship starts during this parliament. There is a wonderful momentum in apprenticeships now and it is something that we all need to capitalise on next year.

I am optimistic about 2015 and beyond;

building stronger and closer relationships with providers, colleges and of course, employers.

My new year’s resolution is to ensure we are a true service, supporting providers, colleges and employers to offer high quality and valuable apprenticeships. Apprenticeships that lead to continued employment and great futures, so our apprentices can truly get in and go far.

Christmas wish list



Peter Lauener

Chief executive of the Education Funding Agency and the Skills Funding Agency



It's great news for the nation that there have been two million apprentices in this parliament.

This could not have been achieved without a lot of hard work by colleges and other training providers across the country, so well done to

everyone involved — and enjoy a good break over Christmas.

It's great to see the difference that good skills training makes to young people and adults alike and to businesses.



Ross Maloney

Chief executive, Find a Future



In 2015 it is our hope that high quality, effective careers advice remains at the top of the FE agenda.

It is simply not enough to offer careers advice. If young people are to be fully supported in their journey from education to employment, the guidance given must be delivered in an

accessible, impartial and impactful way. Find a Future sees the value of this through The Skills Show and all of our products and advocates offering young people more opportunities where they can see careers in practise, try a range of skills and meet employers. Best Wishes for the New Year.



Mark Ravenhall

Chief executive, Further Education Trust for Leadership



Christmas is a time of gifts.

Our wish is that FE is recognised for some of its gifts to society: social and economic inclusion, and for some the only way out of poverty and neglect. For ourselves, instead of gold, the frankincense and myrrh we would like our Magi

in government to really listen to us.

Politicians want to do good things, but do they know how to do them? That's why we would like to confer the gift of listening on them. To make sure they have the very best advice based on the latest thinking and not prejudice.



David Russell

Chief executive, Education and Training Foundation



As my first Christmas as chief executive at the foundation approaches I am looking forward to a brief respite before a busy election year gets underway.

Along with the entire foundation team, I would like to express my gratitude to everyone who has joined us in our mission of supporting colleges and providers in their improvement work.

2014 has been a tough year for some,

but also a year of fantastic success and growth, week-in week-out, for the dedicated professionals who work all across the education and training system. 2015 looks set to be even busier for the foundation, with the publication of our review of English and maths provision, and the launch of our new Professional Membership Service.

Peace at Christmas, and all our best wishes for a Happy New Year.



Lynne Sedgmore

Executive director, 157 Group



We end this busy year still hit by funding cuts and the massive policy changes of the past 12 months — but with some signs that a more measured approach to policy making is coming to the fore, and a definite willingness on the part of politicians and officials to listen to more wide-ranging ideas about the future.

2015 will be dominated by electioneering, and we hope everyone will agree to give some

time for recent reforms to settle in before making further changes.

It would be great to see a commitment to genuinely equal treatment across the education system, and to enhancing the incentives for educational leaders to collaborate in the best interests of learners and their local economies.

Best wishes to all for this festive season.



Stewart Segal

Chief executive of the Association for Employment and Learning Providers



AELP extends season's greetings to everyone in the sector who has worked hard to help transform learners' prospects and respond to employers' recruitment and skills needs.

Despite the continued pressures on public expenditure, the new government in 2015 will hopefully recognise that employment and skills programmes are the best investment in the future success of our economy.

Better value for money will be achieved if we build on a core set of programmes which include a work preparation programme called traineeships, a structured in-work programme called apprenticeship and support programmes for the longer term unemployed including the Work Programme and the Troubled Families programme.



Joe Vinson

NUS vice president (FE)



I'd like to say a big Merry Christmas to the five million FE students I represent.

This Christmas I'd like to see fair financial support available to FE students, so all students can get to college and afford resources and I'd also like to see apprentices being able to access financial support as

£2.73 an-hour isn't enough to live off.

Most of all I'd like to see a Government committed to investing in FE. FE provides important skills and second chances for millions of people and I want it to be the top priority for all the parties.



Stephen Wright

Chief executive, Federation of Awarding Bodies



Looking ahead to 2015, while domestic funded vocational provision declines, there will be continued growth in international markets as well as continuing expansion of employer funded qualifications as more companies use national standards and qualifications to underpin their corporate learning and development strategies.

Domestically we hope that the stronger initiatives from 2014 are allowed to bear fruit and that new policies and initiatives are informed by experience, made effective through dialog and focussed on the impact on learners.

FAB would like to wish all *FE Week* readers a happy Christmas, we are certainly going to enjoy an "interesting" new year.



BOB HARRISON

Member of the Further Education Learning Technology Action Group (Feltag) and the Education Technology Action Group, vice governors' chair Northern College, board member of the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education and the Ufl Trust, and education adviser for Toshiba Information Systems

Feltag's 'assessment tail wagging the pedagogic dog'

The effect of the Further Education Learning Technology Action Group (Feltag) is being felt across the sector, explains Bob Harrison.

At a recent Think Out Loud Club, a community of innovative FE practitioners supported by City & Guilds, the Feltag was described as "a movement not just a report".

It is six months since the government accepted Feltag's 35 recommendations and there are increasing signs that the sector is taking ownership of our report. And that is how it should be.

The Skills Funding Agency (SFA) has issued clarification around the percentage of online delivery issue which seemed to cause anxiety with some providers.

It is also running some online pilots to aid understanding of the incentives that might be needed to encourage more blended learning as Feltag recommended.

While most agencies have been responsive to the Feltag recommendations, discussions with Ofqual have not been as successful and there is still much work to do before the assessment tail has less influence on the pedagogic dog

Consideration is also being given as to whether capital receipts from the sale of underutilised buildings/land can be reinvested in digital technology and staff skills and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) are in negotiation with Ofsted about how the common inspection framework can best support innovation in the use of technology for learning.

But one of the biggest challenges has been the assessment and accountability system. While most agencies have been responsive to the Feltag recommendations, discussions with Ofqual have not been as successful and there is still much work to do before

the assessment tail has less influence on the pedagogic dog.

Nevertheless some awarding bodies are investing considerable time and resource in their exploration of the use of digital, online and onscreen testing.

Most important has been the willingness of Matthew Hancock's replacement as Skills Minister, Nick Boles, to welcome, support and maintain the momentum created by Feltag and encourage FE providers "to innovate in the use of technology for learning".

And I have recently been judging applications for a national FE award for 'Outstanding use of technology' and the quantity and quality of applications suggests Feltag is nudging the thinking in FE towards a more digital future.

In my 35 years' experience in FE I have always found FE teachers enthusiastic and willing to innovate with technology for learning, but they are in need of some leadership vision and support.

Learners are already innovating in their approach to the use of digital technology for learning and life and pupils in schools have growing expectations of digital learning when they leave school.

This is not really about technology but about new ways of thinking. Technology will never replace good teachers, but teachers who use technology effectively will replace those who do not.

The Ministerial intention behind Feltag was, and is, to increase the number of learners and improve the quality of learning and support using technology.

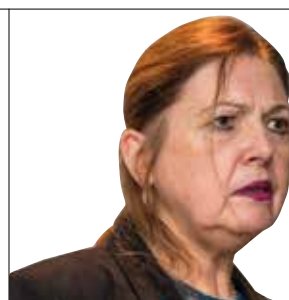
Decisions about the percentage online, which blend suits which learners and the skills of the workforce are rightly the domain of educationalists not the SFA or BIS.

Governors, principals and leaders in FE must take ownership of the problem and decide how they want to realign their asset base. My view is we need more and better teachers skilled in using technology for engaging, supporting and assessing more learners and fewer glass palaces, classrooms, atriums and reception areas massively underused and underutilised for big chunks of the year.

The history of FE suggests that one of its strengths has been the ability to respond to changes in the economy and society in a flexible and responsive way.

This has been an impressive, but long overdue start to the digital challenge facing FE. We need to own the change and pick up the pace.

Just ask Comet, HMV, Jessops, Blockbuster and many other organisations that didn't adapt to the digital challenge quick enough.



CHRISTINE LEWIS

National officer for education, Unison

BIS red tape plan a 'Groundhog Day' for FE and skills

Efforts by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) to cut red tape succeeded in reducing up to £300m of costs by around 2 per cent. Christine Lewis assesses the situation from the point of view of the sector admin staff she represents.

The Simplification Plan was but the latest iteration in a line of attempts to reduce the levels of bureaucracy that bedevil the FE and skills sector.

The Bureaucracy Review Group annual report a decade ago highlighted cause for hope as government and its inspectorates agreed to diminish the red tape burdens that were outlined.

Changes agreed by Ofsted, Adult Learning Inspectorate, Learning and Skills Council and Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) promised a 25 per cent cut in scrutiny processes and workload. A new information management culture was to develop based on trust and measuring performance by accessing real time data used by providers to manage their own business.

For those of us who are veteran stakeholders on FE advisory groups, the Simplification Plan was a Groundhog Day event

QCA was to seek agreement on a common data set that all awarding bodies would supply; information collected at the same time and accessible to other agencies.

It was also to rationalise scrutiny requirements placed on providers leading to a 30 per cent reduction of demand imposed by awarding bodies. Crystal clarity was to be renegotiated on the roles of central government and its agencies with the education department focused on strategic leadership and LSC on managerial implementation.

A radical overhaul of engagement with employers, quality, funding systems and efficiency as well as data was to be mindful of reducing bureaucracy as a success criterion.

For those of us who are veteran stakeholders on FE advisory groups, the

Simplification Plan was a Groundhog Day event. The quango bonfire did little to reduce the administrative burden on colleges and staff.

The National Audit Office (NAO) in 2011 reported on the costs of complying with funding, qualifications and assurance requirements, suggesting a figure of between £250m and £300m. Subsequently, the Public Accounts Committee also expressed concern at the unnecessary burden created by funding, qualification and assurance arrangements.

The NAO refers to agencies that informed the plan and notes that providers had little voice in developing it. This is also the case for the nearly 19,000 administrative and central services staff, who would have no difficulty in describing why the inexorable tide of red tape that comes with new initiatives and requirements, stretches their working hours to the full.

The number of teachers has reduced by more than 3,000 since 2010 and learning support by more than 2,000. We can rest assured that providers would not be adding to their admin staff unless it was imperative.

The FE Commissioner may be able to make a gung-ho statement about the need to cut support staff to balance the books, but that will not diminish the demands for their services in college. If providers responded by reducing this section of their workforce the teaching and learner support function would need to assume all manner of compliance-necessary duties.

The NAO notes that the government cannot estimate the true costs of complying with the assurance regimen, but shows that some of streamlining has saved £4m — which is not a King's ransom in terms of the £7bn estimated cost and is unlikely to impact on staff workloads.

It concludes that the BIS and the Department for Education have not done enough to work together, which touches on the thorny problem of why the two-thirds of 16 to 18-year-olds in colleges, theoretically under the wing of the DFE, are educated in a sector run by BIS and its agencies.

The third of that age group who remain in school do so under a protected budget with no reductions in staffing or feet off the quality pedal.

But there are worrying signs revealed by Unison's administrative and management staff in academies who report significant increase in workload post-transfer.

The various incarnations of bureaucratic entities and their demands that have straddled the FE sector display a real lack of trust in providers and staff, have no democratic foundation and waste money that would be better spent on learners.

Jim Proudfoot considers the purpose of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) and asks ‘what next?’ in light of its scrapping by Ofqual.

The recent Ofqual consultation on the QCF determined its design rules were too restrictive and imposed a one-size-fits-all approach not consistent with the development of high-quality vocational qualifications or those that met the needs of employers.

It has now been confirmed that these rules will go next summer. Transitional arrangements, costs and what signifies a high-quality vocational qualification will be published.

Some awarding organisations (AOs) recognised for QCF only may lose it altogether. Some of their qualifications may no longer be fit for purpose.

All qualifications must be valid, reliable, up-to-date, comparable to others at the same level, manageable and minimize any potential bias.

Ofqual says that qualifications that are not valid will have to be withdrawn or redeveloped. This implies that either there are qualifications already on the register that are not fit for purpose or that one result of withdrawing the QCF rules will mean that some qualifications will no longer be fit for purpose.

How will the Conditions of Recognition be amended to reflect this?

The QCF has been in operation for almost ten years now, about the same length of time as the diploma experiment in schools.



JIM PROUDFOOT

Director of RITS Results Services, former Ofqual accreditation manager and ex (Scottish Qualifications Authority) (SQA) project manager

How will two become one?

One of the main problems with the QCF was the (implied) insistence of sharing units

Its main purpose was to decrease the number of qualifications, especially duplicates, thus making the system clearer and more transparent to both learners and employers.

The numbers of duplicate qualifications and units has risen and this begs the question: “Are learners and employers still confused about which qualification is really relevant and accepted nationally?”

It is important to maintain national standards both for our internal needs as well as our international reputation. Change perceived for political reasons does not help.

One of the main problems with the QCF was the (implied) insistence of sharing units.

If one AO used another’s unit then it was forced to abide by that organisation’s use of the unit, specifically its review date, and also whether it wanted to continue with that version of the unit after that date had passed.

Any AO that uses someone else’s unit has to ask for it to be reviewed to match any extension of its qualification or it could ask for the ownership to be transferred then it would have control.

If neither of these options worked (for example because the owner refused to review it or transfer ownership — maybe because it saw the other organisation as competition) then it could actually just copy the details of the unit and create its own.

This situation has been a bone of

contention between AOs for many years as they do not see why someone can come along and just copy their work for nothing but, once it is on the register, it is Crown Copyright.

Copying, of course, could also put into question the AO’s ability to develop its own units and could be a reason for an intervention by Ofqual against the conditions.

These are all good reasons for getting rid of the QCF. The original aim has been forgotten, probably because of the implications of actually transferring credit along with the fear of competition and, in simple terms, cost. It is easier to do the whole qualification in one place.

Some consider assessment in the QCF as overkill, but the ability for an AO to vary its assessment strategy may be a retrograde step and harder to police.

When a system is changed problems arise and this will mean substantial cost in time for the AOs.

Ofqual’s Regulatory IT System (RITS) may well change or be completely replaced. There are still outstanding transition issues from 2010 when Web-Based Accreditation (WBA) became RITS and certain fields in the new system could not be populated and information was lost or archived.

This varies in the NQF and the QCF. Officially, there is only one framework. The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) does not deal in credit but this is the main aspect of the QCF and it demands sharing.

I look forward to seeing how these two will become one.



STEPHEN WRIGHT

Chief executive of the Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB)

Is this really the end of the QCF?

Despite Ofqual announcing that the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) is set for the FE and skills graveyard, Stephen Wright considers whether any life might remain in the system yet.

In 2004, then-Chancellor Gordon Brown and Education and Skills Secretary Estelle Morris invited Alexander (now Lord) Leitch to consider the UK’s long-term ambition for developing skills.

The subsequent Leitch report of December 2006 paved the way for the Qualifications Credit Framework (QCF) which was launched in 2008.

The hope was that a framework of qualifications built using combinations of shared, standardised units would bring flexibility and order to the “jungle” of qualifications, with common descriptors and structures.

Learners would be issued with a Unique Learner Number (ULN) and a computer based “learner achievement record” which would use a powerful database of

available units and qualifications to check progress towards their target qualification as well as seeing what other qualifications the units contribute to. They could also share the banked information with a potential employer.

Now, six years after the launch of the QCF, it has been condemned by Ofqual as promoting a tick box approach that is not fit for purpose. This, together with a realignment of Ofqual from accreditation of qualifications to regulation of the awarding sector, has led to the announcement that “it will remove the QCF rules” — is this the end of the QCF? Well, maybe not.

Gone is accreditation — the QCF was “policed” by Ofqual who accredited the qualifications put forward by awarding organisations (AOs). However, in reality Ofqual never had the resource to evaluate the thousands of qualifications on the QCF and the process become a fairly meaningless tick box exercise.

Ofqual has now lifted the accreditation role in favour of becoming a more thorough regulator with AOs enjoying more freedom

to add qualifications to the framework, but facing increased scrutiny and extended requirements with a focus on validity.

Gone are shared units — the learner achievement record required AOs to build qualifications from shared units.

However, a number of flaws in this plan were pointed out including the loss of intellectual property, a disincentive to develop new content and an uncertainty about ownership, especially when a unit was withdrawn or redesigned. While AOs can still cooperate, the removal of the shared unit requirement will see a return to qualifications that are particular to individual awarding organisations.

Going – Regulatory IT system (RITS) — the existing system will need to be redeveloped to meet the new Ofqual system.

Going might be the QCF brand — the Impact Assessment document suggests that Ofqual has decided to allow the use of QCF in the title in certain circumstances as long as it is not misleading. The wider use of the brand is still under review. It has been in the market for nearly a decade and AOs have invested heavily in promoting and explaining it to learners and employers.

The loss of the name would throw away brand value and create uncertainty for little or no gain.

Going might also be size descriptors — the QCF introduced common size descriptors of awards (one to 12 credits), certificates (13 to 36 credits) and diplomas (37 credits or more), with a credit being 10 hours of learning.

Redesigning and titling qualifications to meet these descriptors required the renaming of well-established qualifications

and considerable effort, however most AOs are through the pain and beginning to enjoy the benefits of clarity.

Coming might be recognition of AOs by level, sector and purpose — it is unclear how this will be applied, and the potential impact is to restrict the number of AOs in any particular sector or level.

The removal of the shared unit requirement will see a return to qualifications that are particular to individual awarding organisations

The QCF hasn’t delivered Lord Leitch’s vision, however at an enormous investment in both time and money and with a number of flaws, it does bring some clarity and rationality to the vocational qualification provision.

The most common comment at the recent consultation was “not to throw the baby out with the bath water” so hopefully we will end up with a new single framework which retains the elements of the QCF that work.

CAMPUS ROUND-UP

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Ellie's not bashful with Snow White panto stars



Television presenter Jeff Brazier and actress Juliette Dean (back row centre left and right) with South Essex College hairdressing students. Inset: Mr Brazier gets his hair cut by learner Ellie Valentine

South Essex College level three hairdressing student Ellie Valentine wasn't bashful when she cut the hair of television presenter and Snow White pantomime star Jeff Brazier.

Mr Brazier, who is currently a presenter on ITV show This Morning and previously appeared on I'm a Celebrity... Get Me out of Here, visited the college's Thurrock campus with Juliette Dean who is currently appearing with him in the pantomime at the Thameside Theatre in nearby Grays.

They chatted with learners and had their hair cut by Ellie, aged 17, while they were dressed as their characters from the show, Prince Charming and Snow White.

Ellie said: "I'm a big fan of Jeff anyway so I was really looking forward to meeting him. It's the most excitement our class has seen all year."

Nicki Kelly, head of hair and beauty, said: "Jeff and Juliette were lovely, complimenting the college and spending lots of time with the students."

Pulling together for party for seriously ill children

Firefighters pulled together with public services students from Hampshire-based South Downs College to raise £1,200 for a Christmas party for terminally and chronically sick children.

Firefighters from Cosham Fire Station were sponsored to row a combined distance of 500,000 metres on static rowing machines at Sainsbury's supermarket, in nearby Farlington, to fund a party they are organising for local youngsters.

Level three learners Thomas Houlsby, aged 16, and Tanya White, 18, helped organise the

event and even sat in on the rowing machine at one point.

Firefighter Tony Russell said: "The support of the students was invaluable as when we [the firefighters] were called to a fire, both students jumped on the rowing machines until the firefighters returned. The students were exemplary and they were a credit to the college."

Public services lecturer Martyn Bell said: "This is an absolutely amazing achievement and something our students should be proud to say they have been part of."



From Left: Students Thomas Houlsby and Tanya White on the rowing machines

Gifts sent to servicemen and women spending Christmas overseas

A group of GCSE learners from Lincoln College donated gifts and toiletries to members of the armed forces who will be away from their families at Christmas, writes Paul Offord.

Most people will soon be exchanging presents and tucking into their Christmas dinner in the company of loved ones.

But GCSE learners from Lincoln College were moved to take action to boost the spirits of men and women who will miss out on traditional home-comforts this festive season while serving with British armed forces overseas.

The learners filled two large bags with books and DVDs and 10 shoe and boot boxes with festive treats.

One of the students, Gemma Tester, aged 18, said: "Everyone brought in something that we thought we would appreciate if we were away from home at Christmas — I brought toiletries."

"I have friends that are in the Army and relatives that are married to people in the RAF and know that it must be awful to be so far from your loved ones at this time of year."

The idea became reality after GCSE pathway lead Lynn Train-Brown heard from her 14-year-old daughter, Beth, that her Army cadets group, the Lincoln-based Abbey Detachment, was collecting gifts to send to those serving in Kabul, Sierra Leone, and other parts of the Middle East.



GCSE learners with some gift boxes. Right: Army cadets and supervisors with the boxes

Ms Train-Brown said: "There has traditionally been strong links to the military in Lincolnshire — particularly the RAF which has bases in Scampton, Waddington and Coningsby, which means that many of our staff and students are either ex-forces or have relatives currently serving."

"The Army cadet group was also based at the college until earlier this year and they still have close links with us, so we really wanted to help out."

She asked a group of 24 GCSE learners if they would like to support the cause and they enthusiastically agreed.

"The students put in things like toiletries, Christmas puddings and hats that they had brought in from home," said Mrs Train-Brown.

"They also donated lots of tinsel and other Christmas decorations so the troops can brighten up their tents while they're away."

She added a number of learners put letters in the boxes which they wrote themselves and were hoping to receive replies.

Ms Train-Brown said: "We were told that troops who are missing home and might not have many people to keep in contact with really appreciate being written to."

The overall campaign is being run by



Army cadet Beth Train-Brown and student Gemma Tester Sergeant Instructor Kayleigh Tucker, from the Abbey Detachment.

She said: "The aim behind the scheme is to provide those serving overseas during the festive period with as much moral support as we possibly can."

"It is impossible to imagine how hard it is for servicemen and women to be so far away from their families, especially at this time of year, so it is our mission to ensure that serving soldiers have something to brighten their day this Christmas."



From left: Sergeant Instructor Kayleigh Tucker and cadet Kereen Hitchborne

DO YOU WANT TO BE IN CAMPUS ROUND-UP?
Send your stories with pictures to campus@feweek.co.uk including names, ages and course details of students where applicable

& MOVERS SHAKERS

Your weekly guide to who's new and who's leaving

Governors at Warwickshire College Group have announced that Angela Joyce is to join the college group as its new principal.

Ms Joyce has been principal of Peterborough Regional College since 2010 and joins the group of six colleges across Warwickshire and Worcestershire in April.

Ms Joyce said: "As one of the largest and most respected college groups in the UK Warwickshire has an outstanding reputation for teaching and learning and some amazing facilities that provide a first class experience for over 16,000 students each year.

"I am looking forward to working with the team during this challenging time for FE to take the college forward into the future."

Ms Joyce began her career as a secondary school teacher in Leicestershire before moving into FE. She worked at Moulton College for eight years developing its sports, land-based and hospitality and catering curriculum before moving to Peterborough as vice principal and then deputy principal.

A keen athlete who has competed at international level in athletics, Ms Joyce also enjoys horse riding and one day-eventing.

Governors' chair Steve Wood said: "Angela has demonstrated outstanding leadership throughout her career to date and we know that she will bring a new dimension to Warwickshire College Group, ensuring the college group has a strong and successful future."

Ms Joyce replaces Sue Georgious. She was appointed this summer following the shock departure of Mariane Cavalli, who stepped down temporarily before it was announced before it that she would not be returning at all.

Her temporary leave of absence was announced "with immediate effect" at the end of June and she was replaced on an interim basis by governors' chair Ms Georgious.

The college declined to comment further on Ms Cavalli's departure, citing legal reasons.

"We would like to thank Sue for her strong and visible leadership since July and are very pleased that she will be staying with us until

Angela Joyce



Angela is able to join us," added Mr Wood.

Meanwhile, Northumberland College has appointed Marcus Clinton, vice principal since 2010, as its new principal.

He said: "These are exciting times for the college and we are blessed to have such a wonderful staff and student community which has always been a hallmark of the college.

"Our priorities are very clear going forward — our focus will be resolutely on serving the communities of Northumberland and beyond. Delivering the right skills and training to ensure positive outcomes for our students, with high levels of employer engagement central to this.

"Northumberland is a wonderful county and we are committed to engaging with students of all ages wherever they live."

Before joining Northumberland College, Mr Clinton was a head of faculty at South Staffordshire College for 11 years.

Jacqui Henderson CBE, Northumberland

Sue Georgious



Marcus Clinton and Jacqui Henderson

College governors' chair, said: "The college governing body and I are looking forward to working with Marcus as our new principal to take the college forward to deliver a more enterprising and innovative agenda and to continue to fulfil our ambitious aims and objectives."

If you want to let us know of any new faces at the top of your college, training provider or awarding organisation please let us know by emailing news@feweek.co.uk

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our future



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To apply, please send a CV and covering letter for the attention of Julia Martin, Head of Human Resources:

By post: Riverside College, Kingsway Campus, Kingsway, Widnes WA8 7QQ

By email: julia.martin@riverside.ac.uk **Deadline for applications is the 7th January 2015**

Riverside College

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Our curriculum priorities are simple – to continue to improve teaching and learning so that every Barnet and Southgate College student receives an outstanding learning experience and that they are supported, challenged and inspired to achieve or exceed their potential. We are not satisfied with average and we won't be content until all students receive a consistently excellent experience.

That is our purpose and that is what we will achieve.

If you believe that you have the vision, skills, expertise and enthusiasm to make a difference and help us realise our ambition, we want to hear from you.

For further information about these posts please go to:

www.barnetsouthgate.ac.uk/the-college/job-vacancies

Alternatively, please call 020 8266 4353 or email jobs@barnetsouthgate.ac.uk



Closing date: 12 noon 5th January 2015

Interviews: January 2015

All appointments are subject to an Enhanced Disclosure from the Disclosure & Barring Service.

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The team is responsible for maximising sales, meeting defined sales targets and developing our reputation as the partner of choice for software and technology related products and services. The team works with an internally based sales team to drive through proactive campaigns and lead generation. Working in the work based learning market, you will be responsible for key account relationships, account management, delivery of the quota and developing business with new and existing accounts at all levels.

Knowledge and experience of sales planning is required as well as an understanding of the factors affecting the UK education, training and learning sectors. Knowledge of Maytas or a similar solution is highly advantageous and experience of the work based learning or further education markets is preferred.

If you are interested in finding out more about this exciting role, please contact Nigel James, Sales Manager for an informal chat. Nigel can be reached at nigel.james@tribalgroup.com or 07796 274994.

To apply, please visit our vacancies page where you can search for this vacancy and apply online

www.tribalgroup.com/aboutus/workingfortribal/Pages/Vacancies.aspx

Tribal is an equal opportunities employer and positively encourages applications from suitably qualified and eligible candidates regardless of sex, race, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, religion or belief, marital status, or pregnancy and maternity. Tribal has publicly committed to this by signing up to the Two Ticks Positive About Disabled People scheme.

This ensures that all disabled applicants who demonstrate that they meet the minimum criteria of the job description are guaranteed an interview. If you are disabled and feel this applies to you, please let us know on your application form.



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ESOL and GCSE MATHS applicants will need a teaching qualification and subject specific qualifications along with previous teaching experience in their subject area, ideally to adults.

Our ALDD tutors teach entry level English and Maths and also Independent Living Skills. Applicants will need a teaching qualification and experience of teaching adults with learning difficulties and disabilities

FAMILY LEARNING courses fall into two categories – “Family English, Maths and Language” and “Wider Family Learning”. Applicants should have a teaching qualification and recent experience of teaching adults and/or children. Experience of pre-school or KS1/2 and an up to date knowledge of how skills are taught in schools would also be advantageous.

Applicants for all of the positions should be able to adapt teaching and learning strategies and select resources as appropriate in order to meet student needs. They should have excellent communication and interpersonal skills and have the ability to lead, develop and motivate adult students to achieve their learning goals. Excellent record keeping skills and the ability to demonstrate relevant ICT skills including Word, Excel, PowerPoint, E-mail and Internet will also be needed.

**Please call Christina Chacksfield on 01293 853473 for an informal discussion
or e-mail cjchacksfield@aspireSussex.org.uk**



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An awareness of selling products and services in the education sector and the associated regulatory environment is desirable. A high level awareness of effective marketing and PR combined with the ability to manage in-house and external professionals in these disciplines is desirable.

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For an application pack, please contact bridget.randall@oneawards.org.uk

For questions concerning this post please contact Louise Morritt, Chief Executive at louise.morritt@oneawards.org.uk

For more information about One Awards, please visit www.oneawards.org.uk

Closing date: 15 January 2015 Interview date: 23 January 2015



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Principal and Chief Executive c. £150,000 Edinburgh

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An outstanding communicator and inspirational leader, the successful candidate will be required to build on our strong and diverse range of external stakeholders, and position the College as a key business partner. You should have an exceptional track record of leadership and management in complex and multi-faceted organisations, and be strongly committed to working within the College's values. You must demonstrate a passion for education, and for working with learners to help them achieve their maximum potential. This role presents an exciting opportunity for an individual with vision, drive, and enthusiasm to lead the College.

Please visit www.aspenpeople.co.uk/edinburghcollege for more information or call Donogh O'Brien or Katy Gall on 0141 212 7555 for a confidential discussion.



Closing date: Monday 12th January 2015

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Applicants should have a good understanding of credit based learning and of key developments in the national training and education sector as well as experience of working in a competitive sales team. Based in Wakefield, West Yorkshire and requiring extensive travel throughout the region and nationally.

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To find out more about Certa and the above new posts please visit our website at www.certa.org.uk/about/jobs_at_certa where you will find an Application Pack for each post advertised.

The closing date for all applications is **Wednesday 7th January 2015**, with interviews taking place week commencing **19th January 2015**.

Applications can be submitted by email with attachments to jobs@certa.org.uk or by post to: **Recruitment, Certa, OCN House, Lower Warrengate WAKEFIELD, WF1 1SA**

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You will also be expected to demonstrate the ability to:

- Innovatively and effectively manage complex management information and reporting systems (MIS and IT)
- Identify future property needs and developing a property strategy

The successful candidate will hold a full CCAB accountancy qualification (ACA, ACCA, CIPFA, CIMA)

CLOSING DATE: 12PM ON MONDAY 12 JANUARY 2015
INTERVIEWS: 26 & 27 JANUARY 2015



The College is an integral part of the West Suffolk community and has an excellent reputation which extends to national and regional as well as local partners. With an annual turnover of £25 million, West Suffolk College delivers exceptional success to thousands of students.

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FE Week Sudoku challenge

How to play: Fill in all blank squares making sure that each row, column and 3 by 3 box contains the numbers 1 to 9

		2				9		
7								6
	6		4	8	3		2	
		4	9		6	5		
2								8
		1	3		8	4		
	2		1	9	4		3	
1								4
		3				1		

Difficulty:
EASY

			1		5			
2	5			9		7		
	3	7						
		5				1		
3	7			1			8	4
		6				9		
						3	9	
		8		3			6	1
			7		6			

Difficulty:
MEDIUM

Solutions:
Next week

Last Week's solutions

7	4	8	2	3	5	9	1	6
6	1	2	7	4	9	5	8	3
9	5	3	6	1	8	7	2	4
3	6	4	5	2	1	8	9	7
8	7	1	4	9	3	2	6	5
2	9	5	8	6	7	3	4	1
1	8	9	3	5	6	4	7	2
4	3	7	1	8	2	6	5	9
5	2	6	9	7	4	1	3	8

Difficulty:
EASY

4	1	7	3	6	5	2	8	9
9	2	6	1	4	8	5	3	7
3	8	5	9	2	7	6	4	1
2	6	9	8	5	4	1	7	3
7	3	8	2	1	6	4	9	5
5	4	1	7	9	3	8	2	6
1	5	2	4	7	9	3	6	8
6	7	3	5	8	2	9	1	4
8	9	4	6	3	1	7	5	2

Difficulty:
MEDIUM

Spot the difference
to WIN an FE Week mug!



Spot five differences. First correct entry wins an FE Week mug. Text your name and picture of your completed spot the difference to 07969 166 374.

The winner of our last edition's spot the difference was Francine Warren, improvement practitioner at Lewisham Southwark College. She is pictured with eight-year-old son Jacob Warren Yeatman and an FE Week spot the difference prize she won in March.